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THE LIARS

An Original Comedy in Four Acts

BY

HENRY ARTHUR JONES

AUTHOR OF

"THE TEMPTER," "MICHAEL AND HIS LOST ANGEL," "THE
CRUSADERS," "JUDAH," "THE CASE OF REBELLIOUS SUSAN,"
"THE DANCING GIRL," "THE MIDDLEMAN," "THE
ROGUE'S COMEDY," "THE TRIUMPH OF THE
PHILISTINES," "THE MASQUERADERS,"
"THE PHYSICIAN," ETC.

"Above all things, tell no untruth; no, not in trifles; the custom of
it is naughty."—*Sir Henry Sidney's letter to his son Philip Sidney.*

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PERSONS REPRESENTED.

COLONEL SIR CHRISTOPHER DEERING.

EDWARD FALKNER.

GILBERT NEPEAN, Lady Jessica's husband.

GEORGE NEPEAN, Gilbert's brother.

FREDDIE TATTON, Lady Rosamund's husband.

ARCHIBALD COKE, Dolly's husband.

Waiter at "The Star and Garter."

GADSBY, footman at Freddie Tatton's.

TAPLIN, Sir Christopher's servant.

Footman at Cadogan Gardens.

LADY JESSICA NEPEAN	} sisters.
LADY ROSAMUND TATTON	

DOLLY COKE, their cousin.

BEATRICE EBERNOE.

MRS. CRESPIN.

FERRIS, Lady Jessica's maid.

ALL THEATRE
JAN 1859

DR
1897
F09

"The Liars" was produced at the Criterion Theatre, London, under the management of Sir Charles Wyndham, on Wednesday the 6th of October, 1897, and ran there (excepting the summer vacation) till the 2nd of November, 1898.

THE ORIGINAL CAST WAS AS FOLLOWS:

COLONEL SIR CHRISTOPHER DEERING.....	Sir Charles Wyndham
EDWARD FALKNER.....	Mr. T. B. Thalberg.
GILBERT NEPEAN....	Mr. Herbert Standing.
GEORGE NEPEAN.....	Mr. Leslie Kenyon.
FREDDIE TATTON.....	Mr. A. Vane Tempest.
ARCHIBALD COKE.....	Mr. Alfred Bishop.
WAITER	Mr. Paul Berton.
TAPLIN	Mr. R. Lambart.
GADSBY	Mr. C. Terric.
FOOTMAN	Mr. A. Eliot.
MRS. CRESPIN.....	Miss Janette Steer.
BEATRICE EBERNOE.....	Miss Cynthia Brook.
DOLLY COKE.....	Miss Sarah Brooke.
FERRIS... ..	Miss M. Barton.
LADY ROSAMUND TATTON.....	Miss Irene Vanbrugh.
LADY JESSICA NEPEAN.....	Miss Mary Moore.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENERY.

ACT I.

SCENE.—TENT ON THE LAWN OF FREDDIE TATTON'S HOUSE
IN THE THAMES VALLEY, AFTER DINNER,
ON A SUMMER EVENING.

ACT II.

SCENE.—PRIVATE SITTING-ROOM NUMBER TEN AT "THE STAR
AND GARTER" AT SHEPPERFORD ON THE FOLLOWING
MONDAY EVENING.


ACT III.

SCENE.—LADY ROSAMUND'S DRAWING-ROOM, CADOGAN
GARDENS, CHELSEA, ON THE TUESDAY MORNING.

ACT IV.

SCENE.—SIR CHRISTOPHER DEERING'S ROOMS IN VICTORIA
STREET ON THE TUESDAY EVENING.

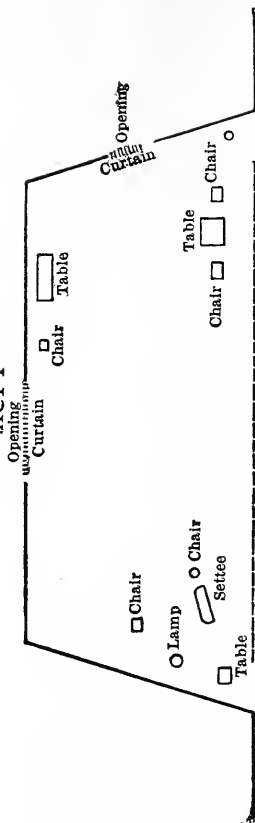
Time.—THE PRESENT.



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THE LIARS

ACT I



ACT I.

SCENE:—*Interior of a large tent on the lawn of FREDDIE TATTON'S house in the Thames valley. The roof of the tent slopes up from the back of the stage. An opening at back discovers the lawn, a night scene of a secluded part of the Thames, and the opposite bank beyond. Small opening L. The tent is of Eastern material, splendidly embroidered in rich Eastern colours. The floor is planked and some rugs are laid down. The place is comfortably furnished for summer tea and smoking room. Several little tables, chairs and lounges, most of them of basket-work. On the table spirit-decanter, soda-water bottles, cigars, cigarettes, empty coffee cups, match-box, etc. Some plants in the corners. Lamps and candles lighted.*

TIME: *After dinner on a summer evening.*

Discover ARCHIBALD COKE and "FREDDIE" TATTON. COKE, a tall, pompous, precise man, about fifty, is seated at side table smoking. FREDDIE, a nervous, weedy little creature about thirty, with no whiskers, and nearly bald, with a very squeaky voice, is walking about.

FREDDIE.

(*Very excited, very voluble, very squeaky.*)¹ It's

1st. Coll. Coke,
Freddie, Mrs.
Crespin, Sir
Christopher,
George.

¹ Walking up
and down C.

all very well for folks to say, "Give a woman her head; don't ride her on the curb." But I tell you this, Coke, when a fellow has got a wife like mine, or Jess, it's confoundedly difficult to get her to go at all without a spill, eh?

¹ Seated L. C.

COKE.¹

It is perplexing to know precisely how to handle a wife (*drinks, sighs*)—very perplexing!

FREDDIE.

Perplexing? It's a d—ee—d silly riddle without any answer! You know I didn't want to have this house-party for the Regatta—(*Coke looks at him.*)—I beg your pardon. Of course I wanted to have you and Dolly, and I didn't mind Gilbert and Jess. But I didn't want to have Falkner here. He's paying a great deal too much attention to Jess, and Jess doesn't choke him off as she should. Well, I thoroughly made up my mind if Jess came, Falkner shouldn't.

COKE.

Yes?

FREDDIE.

Well, Rosamund said he should. So I stuck out, and she stuck out, in fact we both stuck out for a week. I was determined he shouldn't come.

COKE.

Then why did you give in?

FREDDIE.

I didn't.

COKE.

But he's here!

FREDDIE.

Yes; but only for a few days. Rosamund invited

him, unknown to me, and then—well—you see, I was obliged to be civil to the fellow. (*Very confidential.*) I say, COKE—we're tiled in, aren't we? Candidly, what would you do if you had a wife like Rosamund?

COKE.

(*Sententiously.*) Ah! Just so! (*Drinks.*)

FREDDIE.¹

You're the lucky man of us three, Coke.

COKE.

I must own my wife has some good points——

FREDDIE.

Dolly got good points! I should think she has!

COKE.

But she's terribly thoughtless and frivolous.

FREDDIE.

So much the better. Give me a woman that lets a man call his soul his own. That's all I want, Coke, to call my soul my own. And—(*resolutely*) some of these days—(*very resolutely*) I will, that's all!²

(*Enter MRS. CRESPIAN, a sharp, good-looking woman between thirty and thirty-five.*)³

MRS. C.

Is Mr. Gilbert Nepean leaving for Devonshire to-night?

FREDDIE.

Yes. He takes the eleven thirty-four slow and waits for the down fast at Reading.

MRS. C.

To-night?

¹ *Crossing to R. C.*

² *sits on settee R. takes up Bradshaw which is on settee.*

³ *Comes C. from L.*

FREDDIE.

Yes. His steward, Crampton, has been robbing him for years, and now the fellow has bolted with a heap of money and a farmer's wife.

MRS. C.

Mr. Nepean must go to-night? ¹

FREDDIE.

Yes. Why?

MRS. C.

Lady Jessica and Mr. Falkner have gone for a little moonlight row.² I thought Mr. Nepean might like to stay and steer.

FREDDIE.

Oh, Lady Jessica knows the river well.

MRS. C.

Ah, then Mr. Nepean can look after the steward. After all, no husband need emphasize the natural absurdity of his position by playing cox to another man's stroke, need he.³

(Enter COLONEL SIR CHRISTOPHER DEERING, a genial, handsome Englishman about thirty-eight, and GEORGE NEPEAN, a dark, rather heavy-looking man about the same age.⁴

SIR C.

Oh, nonsense, Nepean; you're mistaken!

GEORGE.⁵

You'd better say a word to Falkner——

SIR C.

(With a warning look.) Shush!

¹ Coming down C.

² Crosses to L. C.

³ Going up R. C. to top of settee.

⁴ Comes C.

⁵ R. C.

GEORGE.

If you don't, I shall drop a very strong hint to my brother.

SIR C.

(*More peremptorily.*) Shush, Shush! ¹

FREDDIE.

What's the matter?

SIR C.

Nothing, Freddie, nothing! Our friend here (*trying to link his arm in GEORGE'S—GEORGE stands off*) is a little old-fashioned. He doesn't understand that in all really innocent flirtations ladies allow themselves a very large latitude indeed. In fact, from my very modest experience with the sex—take it for what it's worth—I should say the more innocent the flirtation, the larger the latitude the lady allows herself, eh, Mrs. Crespin? ²

MRS. C.

Oh, we are all latitudinarians at heart.

SIR C.

Yes; but a lady who practises extensively as a latitudinarian rarely becomes a—a—a longitudinarian, eh? ³

MRS. C.

Oh, I wouldn't answer for her! It's a horrid, wicked world; and if once a woman allows one of you wretches to teach her the moral geography of it, it's ten to one she gets her latitude and longitude mixed before she has had time to look at the map. ⁴

FREDDIE. ⁵

(*To SIR CHRISTOPHER.*) I say, I'm awfully sorry

¹ *Crosses to back of table R., looks at paper.*

² *Crosses to Mrs. Crespin R. C. George goes to opening.*

³ *Freddie rises, goes up R., crosses to R. C.*

⁴ *Crosses down R.*

⁵ *Comes down C.*

2nd Call Lady Rosamond and Dolly.

about this. You know I told Rosamund how it would be if we had Falkner here——

SIR C.

(Draws FREDDIE aside.) Shush! Tell Lady Rosamund to caution Lady Jessica——

FREDDIE.

I will. But Rosamund generally does just the opposite of what I tell her. Don't be surprised, old fellow, if you hear some of these days that I've——well, don't be surprised.

SIR C.

At what?

FREDDIE.

1 Very confidentially and bringing Sir C. forward.

Well, I shall ¹——now, candidly, old fellow——we're tiled in, quite between ourselves——if you found yourself landed as I am, what would you do?

SIR C.

You mean if I found myself married?

FREDDIE.

Yes.

SIR C.

I should make the best of it.²

2 Freddie turns up C., sits. George comes L. C. to them. Mrs. Crespin sits on settee R.

GEORGE.

(To SIR C.) Then it's understood that you'll give Falkner a hint?

3 C.

SIR C.³

My dear fellow, surely your brother is the best judge——

GEORGE.

Of what he doesn't see?

SIR C.

He's here.

GEORGE.

He's leaving for Devonshire to-night—unless I stop him. Will that be necessary?

SIR C.

No. Falkner is my friend. I introduced him to Lady Jessica.¹ If you insist, I'll speak to him. But I'm sure you're wrong. He's the very soul of honour.² I didn't live with him out there those three awful years without knowing him.

¹ *Sir C. crosses to L. C. by Coke's chair. George annoyed crosses to R. C.*
² *Mrs. C. gives a sarcastic little laugh.*

GEORGE.

I don't see what your living three years in Africa with him has got to do with it, eh, Mrs. Crespin?

MRS. C.

Let's see how it works out. Falkner behaves most gallantly in Africa. Falkner rescues Mrs. Ebernoe. Falkner splendidly avenges Colonel Ebernoe's death, and strikes terror into every slave-dealer's heart. Falkner returns to England covered with glory. A grateful nation goes into a panic of admiration, and makes itself slightly ridiculous over Falkner. Falkner is the lion of the season. Therefore we may be quite sure that Falkner won't make love to any pretty woman who comes in his way. It doesn't seem to work out right.³

³ *George turns up to Fred C. Sir C. crosses to R. C. and sits on stool by Mrs. Crespin.*

SIR C.

But Falkner is not an ordinary man, not even an ordinary hero.

MRS. C.

My dear Sir Christopher, the one cruel fact about heroes is that they are made of flesh and blood!

Oh, if only they were made of waxwork, of Crown Derby ware, or Britannia metal; but, alas and alas! they're always made of flesh and blood.

COKE.

Where did Falkner come from? What were his people?

SIR C.

His grandfather was what Nonconformists call an eminent divine, his father was a rich city merchant; his mother was a farmer's daughter. Falkner himself is a—well, he's a Puritan Don Quixote, mounted on Pegasus.

MRS. C.

Put a Puritan Don Quixote on horseback, and he'll ride to the—Lady Jessica, eh?

SIR C.

Hush! He'll love and he'll ride away.*

MRS. C.

(*Significantly.*) I sincerely hope so.

COKE.

I must say that Falkner is less objectionable than Dissenters generally are.¹ I have an unconquerable aversion to Dissenters.

SIR C.

Oh, I hate 'em.² But they saved England, hang 'em! And I'm not sure whether they're not the soundest part of the nation to-day.†

MRS. C.

Oh, pray don't tell them so, just as they're getting harmless and sensible—and a little artistic.

(*A piano is played very softly and beautifully*

* *Warning for piano.*

¹ *Rising, crosses to C., and goes up to George R. C.*

² *Rises, crosses down L.*

† *Piano off L.*

at a distance of some twenty yards. They all listen.

MRS. C.

Is that Mrs. Ebernoe? ¹

¹ *Freddie crosses down R.*

SIR C.

Yes.

MRS. C.

What a beautiful touch she has!

SIR C.

She has a beautiful nature.

MRS. C.

Indeed! I thought she was a little stiff and unsociable.² But perhaps we are too frivolous.

² *Sir C. looks annoyed at Mrs. Crespin.*

SIR C.³

³ *crosses to C. goes to opening L. and looks off.*

Perhaps. And she hasn't quite recovered from poor Ebernoe's death.

*(Enter LADY ROSAMUND and DOLLY COKE in evening dress. DOLLY is without any wrap on her shoulders.)*⁴

⁴ *Enter C. from L. Dolly talks to George. Lady R. to Coke.*

MRS. C.

But that's nearly two years ago. Is it possible we still have women amongst us who can mourn two years for a man? It gives me hopes again for my sex.⁵

⁵ *Dolly crosses to table R., looks at paper.*

FREDDIE.

(His back to Lady Rosamund.) I know jolly well Rosamund won't mourn two years for me.⁶

⁶ *Sits on settee. Lady R. comes C.*

LADY R.

(A clear-cut, bright, pretty woman.) You're quite right, Freddie, I shan't. But if you behave very prettily meantime, I promise you a decent six weeks.

¹ Lady R. sits on stool R. C. picks up "Truth." Coke crosses to Dolly.

So be satisfied, and don't make a disturbance down there (*with a little gesture pointing down*) and create the impression that I wasn't a model wife.¹

COKE.

(*In a very querulous, pedantic tone to DOLLY.*) No wrap again! Really, my dear, I do wish you would take more precautions against the night air. If you should take influenza again——

DOLLY.

(*Pretty, empty-headed little woman.*) Oh, my dear Archie, if I do, it is I who will have to cough and sneeze!

COKE.

Yes; but it is I who will be compelled to listen to you. I do wish you would remember how very inconvenient it is for me when you have influenza.

DOLLY.

Oh, my dear, you don't expect me to remember *all* the things that are inconvenient to you. Besides other people don't wrap up. Jessica is out on the river with absolutely nothing on her shoulders.²

² Crosses to back of settee R. Coke goes up L. to Sir C.

MRS. C.

Is it not a physiological fact that when our hearts reach a certain temperature our shoulders may be, and often are, safely left bare?

(GEORGE NEPEAN *has been listening. He comes some steps towards them as if about to speak, stops, then turns and exit with great determination.*)³

³ Exit L. Lady R. rises, crosses down R., looks anxiously after George. Sir C. comes C.

SIR C.

Mrs. Crespin, you saw that?

MRS. C.

Yes. Where has he gone?

SIR C.

I suppose to tell his brother his suspicions. I'm sure you meant nothing just now, but—(*glancing round*)—we are all friends of Lady Jessica's, aren't we?

MRS. C.

Oh, certainly.¹ But don't you think you ought to get Mr. Falkner away?

¹ *Mrs. Crespin rises, goes to Sir C.*

SIR C.

He'll be leaving England soon.² These fresh outbreaks amongst the slave-traders will give us no end of trouble, and the Government will have to send Falkner out. Meantime——

² *Lady R. asks Freddie to make room for her on the settee. He moves to other end. She sits.*

MRS. C.

Meantime, doesn't Mrs. Ebernoe play divinely?

SIR C.

(*Politely intercepting her.*)³ Meantime it's understood that nothing more is to be said of this?

³ *Mrs. Crespin goes up C. Sir C. follows her up.*

MRS. C.

Oh, my dear Sir Christopher, what more can be said?

(*Exit.*)⁴

⁴ *C. to L.*

SIR C.

(*Holds the tent curtains aside for her to pass out; looks after her, shakes his head, perplexed, then turns to COKE.*) Coke what do you say, a hundred up?

COKE.⁵

⁵ *By table L. C.; crosses to C.*

I'm agreeable! Dolly! Dolly!

(LADY ROSAMUND, DOLLY, and FREDDIE are chattering very vigorously together.)

DOLLY.

¹ At back of
settee.

(Doesn't turn round to him.) Well?¹

(Goes on chattering to LADY ROSAMUND and FREDDIE.)

COKE.

You had a tiresome hacking cough, dear, during the greater portion of last night.

DOLLY.

Did I? (Same business.)

COKE.

It would be wise to keep away from the river.

DOLLY.

Oh, very well, dear. I'll try and remember (Same business.)

COKE.

* 3rd Call. Lady
Jessica Falk-
ner.

(Turns, annoyed, to SIR CHRISTOPHER.) I'm a painfully light sleeper. The least thing disturbs me, and—(Looks anxiously at DOLLY, who is still chattering, then turns to SIR C.) Do you sleep well? *

SIR C.

(Links his arm in COKE's.) Like a top. Never missed a night's rest in my life.

* C. to L.

(Takes COKE off at opening.)²

FREDDIE.

* Rises, crosses to
L. C.

(Has been talking angrily to LADY ROSAMUND.) Very well then, what am I to do?³

DOLLY.

Oh, do go and get a whisky and soda, there's a dear Freddie!

FREDDIE.

That's all very well, but if Jessica goes and makes a fool of herself in my house, people will say it was my fault.

LADY R.¹

¹ *Rises, crosses to C.*

What—example, or influence, or sheer desperate imitation?

FREDDIE.

(Pulls himself up, looks very satirical, evidently tries to think of some crushing reply without success.) I must say, Rosamund, that your continued chaff of me and everything that I do is in execrable taste? For a woman to chaff her husband on all occasions is—well, it's in very bad taste, that's all I can say about it!²

² *Lady R. laughs.*

³ *Dolly sits R. C.
Freddie sits L.*

(Exit.)

DOLLY.

Freddie's getting a dreadful fidget. He's nearly as bad as Archie.

LADY R.

Oh, my dear, he's ten times worse. One can't help feeling some small respect for Archie.⁴

⁴ *Sits L. C.*

DOLLY.

Oh, do you think so? Well, yes, I suppose Archie is honourable and all that.

LADY R.

Oh, all men are honourable. They get kicked out if they aren't. My Freddie's honourable in his poor little way.

DOLLY.

Oh, don't run Freddie down. I rather like Freddie.

LADY R.

Oh, if you had to live with him——

DOLLY.

Well, he always lets you have your own way.

LADY R.

I wish he wouldn't. I really believe I should love and respect him a little more if he were to take me and give me a good shaking, or do something to make me feel that he's my master. But (*sighs*) he never will! He'll only go on asking everybody's advice how to manage me—and never find out. As if it weren't the easiest thing in the world to manage a woman—if men only knew.

DOLLY.

Oh, do you think so? I wonder if poor old Archie knows how to manage me!

LADY R.

Archie's rather trying at times.

DOLLY.

Oh, he is! He's so frumpish and particular, and he's getting worse.

LADY R.

Oh, my dear, they do as they grow older.

DOLLY.

Still, after all, Freddie and Archie aren't quite so awful as Gilbert.

LADY R.

Oh, Gilbert's a terror. I hope Jessica won't do anything foolish——

(A very merry peal of laughter heard off, followed by LADY JESSICA'S voice.)

(Heard off.) Oh, no, no, no, no, no! Please keep away from my dress! Oh, I'm so sorry! *(Laughing a little.)* But you are—so—so——

(Another peal of laughter.)

FALKNER.

(Heard off, a deep, rich, sincere, manly tone.)
So ridiculous? I don't mind that!

LADY J.

(Heard off.) But you'll take cold. Do go and change!

FALKNER.

(Heard off.) Change? That's not possible! *

* *Piano off stops*

(LADY JESSICA appears at opening at back, looking off, smothering her laughter. She is a very bright, pretty woman about twenty-seven, very dainty and charming. Piano ceases.)

LADY J.

Oh, the poor dear, foolish fellow! ¹ Look!

¹ *Comes down C.*

LADY R.

What is it?

LADY J.

My ten-and-sixpenny brooch! He kept on begging for some little souvenir, so I took this off. That quite unhinged him. I saw he was going to be demonstrative, so I dropped the brooch in the river and made a terrible fuss. He jumped in, poor

dear, and fished it up. It was so muddy at the bottom! He came up looking like a *fin-de-siècle* Neptune—or a forsaken merman—or the dragged figure-head of a penny Thames steamboat.

LADY R.

(*Very seriously.*) Jess, the men are talking about you.

LADY J.

(*Very carelessly.*) Ah, are they? Who is?

LADY R.

My Freddie says that you——

LADY J.

(*Interrupting on "says."*) My dear Rosy, I don't mind what your Freddie says any more than you do.

LADY R.

But George has been fizzing up all the evening.

LADY J.

Oh, let him fizz down again.

LADY R.

But I believe he has gone to give Gilbert a hint——

LADY J.

(*Showing annoyance.*) Ah, that's mean of George! How vexing! Perhaps Gilbert will stay now.

LADY R.

Perhaps it's as well that Gilbert should stay.

LADY J.

What? My dear Rosy, you know I'm the very

best of wives, but it does get a little monotonous to spend all one's time in the company of a man who doesn't understand a joke—not even when it's explained to him!

LADY R.¹

¹ *Rises, crosses to C.*

Jess, you really must pull up.

DOLLY.

Yes, Jess. Mrs. Crespin was making some very cattish remarks about you and Mr. Falkner.

LADY J.

Was she? Rosy, why do you have that woman here?

LADY R.

I don't know. One must have somebody. I thought you and she were very good friends.

LADY J.

Oh, we're the best of friends, only we hate each other like poison.

LADY R.

I don't like her. But she says such stinging things about my Freddie, and makes him so wild.

LADY J.

Does she? I'll ask her down for the shooting. Oh! I've got a splendid idea! *

LADY R.

* *With Call-Gilbert (cigar and case)*

What is it? ²

LADY J.

² *Dolly rises, and goes to Jess.*

A new career for poor gentlewomen. You found a school and carefully train them in all the best traditions of the gentle art of husband-baiting. Then you invite one of them to your house, pay her,

¹ *They all laugh.*

of course, a handsome salary, and she assists you in "the daily round, the common task" of making your husband's life a perfect misery to him.¹ After a month or so she is played out and retires to another sphere, and you call in a new—lady-help!

LADY R.

Oh, I don't think I should care to have my Freddie systematically henpecked by another woman.

LADY J.

No; especially as you do it so well yourself. Besides, your Freddie is such a poor little pocket-edition of a man—I hope you don't mind my saying so——

LADY R.

Oh, not at all. He's your own brother-in-law.

LADY J.

Yes; and you may say what you like about Gilbert.

DOLLY.

Oh, we do, don't we, Rosy?

LADY J.

Do you? Well, what do you say?

DOLLY.

Oh, it wouldn't be fair to tell, would it, Rosy? But Mrs. Crespin said yesterday——

(LADY ROSAMUND *glances at DOLLY and stops her.*)

LADY J.

About Gilbert?

DOLLY.

Yes.

LADY J.

Well, what did she say?
(DOLLY glances at LADY ROSAMUND inquiringly.)

LADY R.

No, Dolly, no!

LADY J.

Yes, Dolly! Do tell me.

LADY R.

No, no!

LADY J.

I don't care what she said, so long as she didn't say he could understand a joke. That would be shamefully untrue. I've lived with him for five years, and I'm sure he can't. But what did Mrs. Crespin say, Rosy?

LADY R.

No, it really was a little too bad.

DOLLY.

Yes. I don't much mind what anybody says about Archie, but if Mrs. Crespin had said about him what she said about Gilbert——

LADY J.

But what did she say? Rosy, if you don't tell me, I won't tell you all the dreadful things I hear about your Freddie. Oh, do tell me! There's a dear!

LADY R.

Well she said—— (*Begins laughing.*)

(DOLLY begins laughing.)

LADY J.

Oh, go on! go on! go on!

LADY R.

She said—no, I'll whisper!

(LADY JESSICA inclines her ear, LADY ROSAMUND whispers; DOLLY laughs.)

LADY J.

About Gilbert? (*Beginning to laugh.*)

LADY R.

Yes. (*Laughing.*)

(*They all join in a burst of laughter which grows louder and louder. At its height enter*¹ GILBERT NEPEAN. *He is a man rather over forty, much the same build as his brother GEORGE; rather stout, heavy figure, dark complexion; strong, immobile, uninteresting features; large, coarse hands; a habit of biting his nails. He is dressed in tweeds, long light ulster and travelling cap, which he does not remove. As he enters, the laughter, which has been very boisterous, suddenly ceases. He goes up to table without taking any notice of the ladies; very deliberately takes out cigar from case, strikes a match which does not ignite, throws it down with an angry gesture and exclamation; strikes another which also does not ignite; throws it down with a still angrier gesture and exclamation. The third match ignites, and he deliberately lights his cigar. Meantime, as soon as he has reached table, LADY JESSICA, who stands behind him, exchanges glances with DOLLY and LADY ROSAMUND, and makes a little face behind his back. LADY R. winks at LADY JESSICA, who responds by pulling a mock long face. LADY R. steals off.*² DOLLY shrugs her shoulders at LADY

¹ C. from L.

² C.

JESSICA, *who pulls her face still longer.* DOLLY ROSAMUND *steals quietly off after* LADY.¹ GILBERT *is still busy with his cigar.* LADY JESSICA *does a little expressive pantomime behind his back.*²

¹ C.

GILBERT.

What's all this tomfoolery with Falkner?

LADY J.

Tomfoolery?

GILBERT.

George says you are carrying on some tomfoolery with Falkner.

LADY J.

Ah! that's very sweet and elegant of George. But I never carry on any tomfoolery with anyone—because I'm not a tomfool, therefore I can't.

GILBERT.

I wish for once in your life you'd give me a plain answer to a plain question.

LADY J.

Oh, I did once.³ You shouldn't remind me of that. But I never bear malice. Ask me another, such as—if a herring and a half cost three ha'pence, how long will it take one's husband to learn politeness enough to remove his cap in his wife's presence?

GILBERT.

(*Instinctively takes off his cap, then glancing at her attitude, which is one of amused defiance, he puts the cap on again.*) There's a draught here.

LADY J.

The lamp doesn't show it. But perhaps you are right to guard a sensitive spot.

² Throws him three kisses, shrugs her shoulders, crosses to settee and sits. Gilbert crosses to C.

³ Gilbert gives a grunt, crosses down to L., helps himself to a drink.

GILBERT.

I say there's a confounded draught.

LADY J.

Oh, don't tell fibs, dear. Because if you do, you'll go—where you *may* meet me; and then we should have to spend such a very long time together.

GILBERT.

¹ Goes up L.,
crosses to C.

^{5th} Calls servant.

(*Nonplussed, a moment or two; ¹ takes out his watch.*) I've no time to waste. I must be down in Devonshire to-morrow to go into this business of Crampton's. But before I go, I mean to know the truth of this nonsense between you and Falkner.*

LADY J.

Ah!

GILBERT.

Shall I get it from you—or from him?

LADY J.

Wouldn't it be better to get it from me? Because he mightn't tell you *all*?

GILBERT.

All? Then there is something to know?

LADY J.

Heaps. And if you'll have the ordinary politeness to take off that very ugly cap I'll be very sweet and obedient and tell you *all*.

² Moves a little to
L., and near
chair L. C.

GILBERT.

Go on!²

³ Pointing to his
head.

LADY J.

Not while the cap sits there!³

GILBERT.

I tell you I feel the draught.

(LADY JESSICA rises, goes to the tent openings, carefully draws the curtains. He watches her, sulkily.)

LADY J.

There! now you may safely venture to uncover the sensitive spot.¹

¹ Sits on settee.

GILBERT.

(Firmly.) No.

LADY J.

(Serenely, seated.) Very well, my dear. Then I shan't open my lips.

GILBERT.

You won't?

LADY J.

No; and I'm sure it's far more important for you to know what is going on between Mr. Falkner and me than to have that horrid thing sticking on your head.

GILBERT.

(Takes a turn or two, bites his nails, at length sulkily flings the cap on the chair.)² Now!

² L. C.

LADY J.

Mr. Falkner is very deeply attached to me, I believe.

GILBERT.

He has told you so?

LADY J.

No.

GILBERT.

No?

LADY J.

No; but that's only because I keep on stopping him.

GILBERT.

You keep on stopping him?

LADY J.

Yes; it's so much pleasanter to have him dangling for a little while, and *then*——

GILBERT.

Then what?

LADY J.

Well, it is pleasant to be admired.

GILBERT.

And you accept his admiration?

LADY J.

Of course I do. Why shouldn't I? If Mr. Falkner admires me, isn't that the greatest compliment he can pay to your taste? And if he spares you the drudgery of being polite to me, flattering me, complimenting me, and paying me the hundred delicate little attentions that win a woman's heart, I'm sure you ought to be very much obliged to him for taking all that trouble off your hands.

GILBERT.¹

(*Looks furious.*) Now understand me. This nonsense has gone far enough. I forbid you to have anything further to say to the man.

LADY J.

Ah, you forbid me!

GILBERT.

I forbid you. And, understand, if you do——

LADY J.

Ah, take care! Don't threaten me!

¹ *Crosses down
L.; back to C.*

GILBERT.¹

Do you mean to respect my wishes?

LADY J.

Of course I shall respect your wishes. I may not obey them, but I will respect them.

GILBERT.²

(*Enraged, comes up to her very angrily.*) Now, Jessica, once for all——

(*Enter GEORGE,³ GILBERT stops suddenly.*)

GEORGE.

The dog-cart's ready, Gilbert. What's the matter?

GILBERT.

Nothing. (*To LADY JESSICA.*)⁴ You'll please to come on to me at Teignwick to-morrow.

LADY J.

Can't. I've promised to go to Barbara, and I must keep my promise, even though it parts me from you.

(*Enter Servant.*)⁵

SERV.

You've only just time to catch the train, sir.

GILBERT.

I'm not going.

SERV.

Not going, sir?

GILBERT.

No.

(*Exit Servant.*)⁶

LADY J.

(*Appeals to GEORGE.*) Isn't it dear of him to

¹ *Going down L.*

² *Throws cigar away.*

³ *Crosses from L. comes a step C.*

⁴ *George goes down L. in front of table.*

⁵ *C. from L.*

⁶ *C. to L. Lady Jess rises. Crosses C. to L.*

stay here on my account when he knows he ought to be in Devon? Isn't it sweet to think that after five long years one has still that magnetic attraction for one's husband? ¹

¹ *Crosses to back of table L. C., looks at paper.*

GILBERT.

No. I'm hanged if I stay on your account. (*Goes up to opening, calls out.*) Hi! Gadsby! I'm coming! ² Understand, I expect you at Teignwick to-morrow.

² *Comes back to C.*

LADY J.

Dearest, I shan't come.

GILBERT.

I say you shall!

LADY J.

"Shall" is not a pretty word for a husband to use.

(*Takes up the cap he has thrown down and stands twiddling the tassel.*)

GILBERT.

(*After a furious dig at his nails.*) George, I expect this business of Crampton's will keep me for a week, but I can't tell. ³ Look after everything while I'm away. (*To LADY JESSICA.*) ⁴ You won't come to Teignwick?

³ *Shaking George's hand.*
⁴ *Gilbert crosses to Lady Jess. George crosses down R. and round to back of settee. Looks at paper.*

LADY J.

I've promised Barbara. Here's your cap. ⁵

GILBERT.

Good-bye, George! ⁶ (*Looks at LADY JESSICA, and is then going off at back.*)

⁶ *Turns up C.*

LADY J.

Ta, ta, dearest! ⁷

⁷ *Still looking at paper L.*

GILBERT.

(Turns, comes a step or two to LADY JESSICA, livid with anger; speaks in her ear.) You'll go just one step too far some day, madam, and if you do, look out for yourself, for, by God! I won't spare you!

(Exit.¹ LADY JESSICA stands a little frightened, goes up to opening at back, as if to call him back, comes down.² GEORGE stands watching her, smoking.)

¹ C. to L.

² In front of table L. C.

LADY J.

(After a little pause.) George, that was very silly of you to tell Gilbert about Mr. Falkner and me.

GEORGE.

I thought you had gone far enough.

LADY J.

Oh no, my dear friend. You must allow me to be the best judge of how far——

GEORGE.

How far you can skate over thin ice?

LADY J.³

³ Crosses to C.

The thinner the ice the more delicious the fun, don't you think? Ah, you're like Gilbert. You don't skate—or joke.⁴

⁴ Sits L. C.

GEORGE.

You heard what Gilbert said?

LADY J.

Yes; that was a hint to you. Won't it be rather a tiresome task for you?

¹ *Coming toward her C.*

GEORGE.
What? ¹

LADY J.

To keep an eye on me, watch that I don't go that one step too far. And not quite a nice thing to do, eh?

GEORGE.

Oh, I've no intention of watching you——

(*Enter FALKNER.*)²

(*Looking at the two.*) Not the least intention, I assure you.³ (*Exit.*)

¹ *L. pleased at seeing Lady Jess. Sees George turn up C., looks off. George crosses to Lady Jess.*
² *Falkner comes down C. George exits L.*

LADY J.

So to-morrow will break up our pleasant party.

FALKNER.

(*About forty, strong, fine, clearly-cut features, earnest expression, hair turning gray, complexion pale and almost gray with continued work, anxiety, and abstinence.*) And after to-morrow?

LADY J.

Ah, after to-morrow! ⁴

⁴ *Rises, crosses to R., picks flowers in bowl on table R.*

FALKNER.

When shall we meet again?

LADY J.

Shall we meet again? Yes, I suppose. Extremes do meet, don't they? ⁵

⁵ *Coming to him.*

FALKNER.

Are we extremes?

LADY J.

Aren't we? I suppose I'm the vainest, emptiest, most irresponsible creature in the world——

FALKNER.

You're not! you're not! You slander yourself! You can be sincere, you can be earnest, you can be serious——

LADY J.*

*6th call. Ferris,
Sir Christopher.*

Can I? Oh, do tell me what fun there is in being serious! I can't see the use of it. There you are, for instance, mounted on that high horse of seriousness, spending the best years of your life in fighting African slave-traders and other windmills of that sort. Oh do leave the windmills alone! They'll all tumble by themselves by-and-by.

FALKNER.

I'm not going to spend the best years of my life in fighting slave-traders. I'm going to spend them—in loving you. (*Approaching her very closely.*)

LADY J.

Oh, that will be worse than the windmills—and quite as useless. (*He is very near to her.*) If you please—you remember we promised to discuss all love-matters at a distance of three feet, so as to allow for the personal equation.¹ Your three feet, please.

FALKNER.

When shall we meet again?

LADY J.

Ah, when? Where do you go to-morrow night, when you leave here?²

FALKNER.

I don't know. Where do you?

LADY J.

To my cousin Barbara's.

¹ *He moves to her. She motions him away.*

² *Turning up C. Falkner follows.*

FALKNER.

Where is that?

LADY J.

Oh, a little way along the river, towards town;
not far from Staines.

FALKNER.

In what direction?

LADY J.

About two miles to the nor'-nor'-sou'-west. I
never was good at geography.¹

FALKNER.

Is there a good inn near?

LADY J.

There's a delightful little riverside hotel, the Star
and Garter, at Shepperford. They make a speciality
of French cooking.

FALKNER.

I shall go there when I leave here to-morrow.
May I call at your cousin's?

LADY J.

It wouldn't be wise. And I'm only staying till
Monday.²

FALKNER.

And then?

LADY J.

On Monday evening I go back to town.

FALKNER.

Alone?³

LADY J.

No; with Ferris, my maid. Unless I send her on
first.

¹ *Coming down
R. C.*

² *Sits on settee R.*

³ *Bending over
her. She mo-
tions him
away.*

FALKNER.

And you will?

LADY J.

No; I don't think so. But a curious thing happened to me the last time I stayed at Barbara's. I sent Ferris on with the luggage in the early afternoon, and I walked to the station for the sake of the walk. Well, there are two turnings, and I must have taken the wrong one.

FALKNER.

What happened?

LADY J.

I wandered about for miles, and at half-past seven I found myself, very hot, very tired, very hungry, and in a very bad temper, at the Star and Garter at Shepperford. That was on a Monday too.

FALKNER.

That was on a Monday?

LADY J.

Yes—hark! (*Goes suddenly to back,*¹ *looks off.*)
Oh, it's you, Ferris! What are you doing there?

(*FERRIS, a perfectly-trained lady's maid, about thirty, dark, quiet, reserved, a little sinister-looking, appears at opening at back with wrap in hand.*)

FERRIS.

I beg pardon, my lady. But I thought you might be getting chilly, so I've brought you this.

LADY J.

Put it on the chair.²

FERRIS.

Yes, my lady.

(*Exit.*)³

¹ *Draws back the curtain. Ferris is listening; she starts as curtain opens. Falkner crosses down R.*

² *Comes down L. C.*

³ *Ferris puts wrap on chair U. L. C., looks at Falkner as she goes and exit C. Lady Jess. goes L.*

LADY J.

(*Yawns.*) Heigho! Shall we go into the billiard room? (*Going.*)

FALKNER.

¹ *Crosses to her.* No.¹ How long do you mean to play with me?

LADY J.

Am I playing with you?

FALKNER.

² *Lady Jess looks hurt.* What else have you done the last three months?² My heart is yours to its last beat. My life is yours to its last moment. What are you going to do with me?

LADY J.

Ah, that's it! I'm sure I don't know. (*Smiling at him.*) What shall I do with you?

FALKNER.

Love me! love me! love me!

LADY J.

You are very foolish!

FALKNER.

Foolish to love you?

LADY J.

No; not foolish to love me. I like you for that. But foolish to love me so foolishly. Foolish to be always wanting to play Romeo, when I only want to play Juliet sometimes.

FALKNER.

Sometimes? When?

LADY J.

When I am foolish too—on a Monday evening.¹

¹ *Crosses in front of chair down L.*

FALKNER.

Ah! will you drive me mad? Shall I tear you to pieces to find out if there is a heart somewhere within you?²

² *About to clasp her.*

LADY J.

(*Struggling.*) Hush! some one coming.

(FALKNER releases her.)

(SIR CHRISTOPHER saunters in at back, smoking.)

(Exit LADY JESSICA.)

SIR C.³

³ *R. C.*

Drop it, Ned! Drop it, my dear old boy! You're going too far.

FALKNER.⁴

⁴ *L.*

We won't discuss the matter, Kit.

SIR C.

Yes we will, Ned. George Nepean has been making a row, and I—well, I stroked him down. I said you were the soul of honour——

FALKNER.

You were right. I am the soul of honour.

SIR C.

And that you didn't mean anything by your attentions to Lady Jessica.

FALKNER.

You were wrong. I do mean something.

SIR C.

Well, what?

FALKNER.

That's my business—and Lady Jessica's.

SIR C.

You forget—I introduced you here.

FALKNER.

¹L. Thank you. You were very kind. (*Going off.*)¹

SIR C.

(*Stopping him.*) No, Ned; we'll have this out, here and now, please.

²Crosses to R. C.

FALKNER.²

(*Angrily.*) Very well, let's have it out, here and now!

SIR C.

(*With great friendship.*) Come, old boy, there's no need for us to take this tone. Let's talk it over calmly, as old friends and men of the world.

FALKNER.

³Crosses down L.

Men of the world! If there is one beast in all the loathsome fauna of civilization that I hate and despite, it is a man of the world!³ Good heaven, what men! what a world!

SIR C.

⁴Falkner crosses to R.

Quite so, old fellow. It is a beastly bad world—a lying, selfish, treacherous world! A rascally bad world every way.⁴ But bad as it is, this old world hasn't lived all these thousands of years without getting a little common sense into its wicked old noddle—especially with regard to its love affairs. And, speaking as an average bad citizen of this blackguardly old world, I want to ask you, Ned Falkner, what the devil you mean by making love to a mar-

ried woman, and what good or happiness you expect to get for yourself or her? Where does it lead? What's to be the end of it?

FALKNER.

I don't know—I don't care! I love her!

SIR C.

But, my good Ned, she's another man's wife.

FALKNER.

She's married to a man who doesn't value her, doesn't understand her, is utterly unworthy of her.

SIR C.

All women are married to men who are utterly unworthy of them—bless 'em! All women are undervalued by their husbands—bless 'em! All women are misunderstood—bless 'em again!

FALKNER.¹

¹ *Crosses to L. A.*

Oh, don't laugh it off like that. Look at that thick clown of a husband. They haven't a single idea, or thought, or taste in common.

SIR C.²

² *Sits R.*

That's her lookout before she married him.

FALKNER.

But suppose she didn't know, didn't understand. Suppose experience comes too late!

SIR C.

It generally does—in other things besides marriage!

FALKNER.

But doesn't it make your blood boil to see a woman sacrificed for life?

SIR C.

It does—my blood boils a hundred times a day. But marriages are made in heaven, and if once we set to work to repair celestial mistakes and indiscretions, we shall have our hands full. Come down to brass tacks. What's going to be the end of this?

FALKNER.

I don't know—I don't care! I love her!

SIR C.

You don't know? I'll tell you. Let's go over all the possibilities of the case. (*Ticking them off on his fingers.*) Possibility number one—you leave off loving her——

FALKNER.

That's impossible.¹

SIR C.

Possibility number two—you can, one or the other, or both of you, die by natural means; but you're both confoundedly healthy, so I'm afraid there's no chance of that. Possibility number three—you can die together by poison, or steel, or cold Thames water. I wouldn't trust *you* not to do a fool's trick of that sort; but, thank God, she's got too much sense. By the way, Ned, I don't think she cares very much for you——

FALKNER.

She will.

SIR C.

Well, well, we shall see. Possibility number four—you can keep on dangling at her heels, and being made a fool of, without getting any—"forrarder."

FALKNER.¹

Mine is not a physical passion.

SIR C.

(*Looks at him for two moments.*) Oh, that be hanged!

FALKNER.

I tell you it is not.

SIR C.

Well then, it ought to be.

FALKNER.

(*Very angrily.*) Well then, it is! And say no more about it. What business is it of yours?²

SIR C.

(*Nonplussed.*) Possibility number five—a liaison with her husband's connivance. Gilbert Nepean won't make a mari complaisant. Dismiss that possibility.

FALKNER.

Dismiss them all.³

SIR C.

Don't you wish you could? But you'll have to face one of them, Ned. Possibility number six—a secret liaison. That's nearly impossible in society. And do you know what it means? It means in the end every inconvenience and disadvantage of marriage without any of its conveniences and advantages. It means endless discomfort, worry, and alarm. It means constant sneaking and subterfuges of the paltriest, pettiest kind. What do you say to that, my soul of honour?

FALKNER.

I love her. I shall not try to hide my love.

¹ *Rising, and crosses to Sir C., R. C.*

² *Turns up C.*

³ *Comes down C.*

SIR C.

¹ *Falkner snaps his fingers and crosses down R.*

Oh, then, you want a scandal!¹ You'll get it! Have you thought what sort of a scandal it will be? Remember you've stuck yourself on a pedestal, and put a moral toga on. That's awkward. It wants such a lot of living up to. Gilbert Nepean is a nasty cuss and he'll make a nasty fuss. Possibility number seven, tableau one—Edward Falkner on his moral pedestal in a toga-esque attitude, honoured and idolized by the British public. (*Striking a heroic attitude.*) Tableau two—a horrible scandal, a field day for Mrs. Grundy; Edward Falkner is dragged from his pedestal, his toga is torn to pieces, his splendid reputation is blown to the winds, and he is rolled in the mud under the feet of the British public who, six months ago, crowned him with garlands and shouted themselves hoarse in his praise. Are you prepared for that, my soul of honour?

FALKNER.

² *Crosses to L. C. Sir C. rises, Crosses to L. C.*

If it comes.²

SIR C.

³ *7th Call—Servant Beatrice.*

(*Shakes his head, makes a wry face, then proceeds.*)* Possibility number eight. Last remaining possibility, only possible possibility—pull yourself together, pack up your traps, start to-morrow morning for Africa or Kamtschatka, Jericho or Hong-Kong. I'll go with you. What do you say?

FALKNER.

No.

SIR C.

No?

FALKNER.

I wonder at you, Deering—I wonder at you coming to lecture me on love and morality.

SIR C.

Ah, why?

FALKNER.

(*With growing indignation.*) I love a woman with the deepest love of my heart, with the purest worship of my soul. If that isn't moral, if that isn't sacred, if that isn't righteous, tell me, in heaven's name, what is? ¹ And you come to lecture me with your cut and dried worldly-wise philosophy, your mean little maxims, you come to lecture me on love and morality—you! ²

¹ Turns up C.,
and down
again.

² Crosses down
L.

SIR C.

Yes, I do! I may have had my attachments, I may have done this, that, and the other. I'm not a hero, I'm not on a pedestal, I never put on a moral toga. But I owe no woman a sigh or a sixpence. I've never wronged any man's sister, or daughter, or wife. And I tell you this, Ned Falkner, you're a fool if you think that anything can come of this passion of yours for Lady Jessica, except misery and ruin for her, embarrassment and disgrace for you, and kicking out of decent society for both of you. ³

³ Sir C. crosses to
R. C. Falkner
crosses to C.

FALKNER.

(*Very firmly.*) Very well. And will you please be the first to cut me. Or shall I cut you?

SIR C.

You mean that, Ned?

FALKNER.

Yes; if I'm a fool, leave me to my folly. (*Very strongly.*) Don't meddle with me. ⁴

⁴ Sits L. C.

SIR C.

You do mean that, Ned? Our friendship is to end?

FALKNER.

¹ Takes paper.

Yes.¹

SIR C.

² Goes up C. turns, comes back to Falkner behind him.

Very well.² You'll understand some day, Ned, that I couldn't see an old comrade, a man who stood shoulder to shoulder with me all these years—you'll understand I couldn't see him fling away honour, happiness, reputation, future, everything, without saying one word and trying to pull him up. Good-bye, old chap. (*Going off.*)³

³ C.

(FALKNER springs up generously, goes to him warmly, holding out both hands.)

FALKNER.

(*Cries out.*) Kit!

SIR C.

Ned!

(*The two men stand with hands clasped for some time, then FALKNER speaks in a soft, low, broken voice.*)

FALKNER.

I love her, Kit—you don't know how much. When I see her, that turn of her head, that little toss of her curls, the little roguish face she makes—God couldn't make her like that and then blame a man for loving her! If He did—well, right or wrong, I'd rather miss heaven than one smile, one nod, one touch of her finger-tips!⁴

⁴ Crosses down R.

SIR C.

Oh, my poor dear old fellow, if you're as far

gone as that, what the deuce am I to do with you?

(Enter ¹ BEATRICE EBERNOE, a tall, dark woman, about thirty, very beautiful and spirituelle.)

¹ L. Crosses to Falkner.

BEA.

Ned, here's a messenger from the Colonial Office with a very urgent letter for you.

FALKNER.

For me?

(Enter Servant ² bringing letter to FALKNER.)

² L.

SERV.

Important, sir. The messenger is waiting in the hall for your answer.

FALKNER.

(Taking letter.) Very well, I'll come to him.

(Exit SERVANT.)³

³ L. Beatrice talks to Sir C.

FALKNER.

(Reading letter.) More trouble out there. They want me to go out at once and negotiate. They think I could win over the chiefs and save a lot of bloodshed.

SIR C.

You'll go, Ned?

FALKNER.

I don't know.

SIR C.

(To BEATRICE.) Help me to persuade him.

BEA.

Can I? Have I any influence?⁴ Ned, for the sake of old days——

⁴ Crosses to Falkner, puts her hand on his shoulder.

FALKNER.

Ah, no—let me be—I must think this over.

*(Exit with distracted manner.)*¹

BEA.

Have you spoken to him?

SIR C.

Yes; I gave him a thorough good slanging. Not a bit of use. When one of you holds us by a single hair, not all the king's horses and all the king's men can drag us back to that beggarly dusty old tow-path of duty.

BEA.

I won't believe men are so weak.

SIR C.

Aren't we? There never was so sensible a man as I am in the management of other men's love affairs. You should have heard me lecture Ned. But once put me near you, and I'm every bit as bad as that poor fool I've been basting! *

* 3th call. Lady
Jess.

(Indicating FALKNER by inclination of the head towards the direction he has gone.)

BEA.

Oh, no, Kit, I won't have you say that.

SIR C.

But I am.² How beautifully you played just now.

¹ Putting R. foot
on stool R. C.

BEA.

Did I?

SIR C.

Don't do it again.

BEA.

Why not?

SIR C.

It's taking an unfair advantage of me. You oughtn't to rouse those divine feelings in a man's heart. You oughtn't to make me feel like a martyr, or a king, or a saint in a cathedral window, with all heaven's sunlight streaming through me! You oughtn't to do it! Because devil a ha'porth of a king, or a martyr, or a saint is there in me—and after you've been playing to me and lifted me into that seventh heaven of yours, I feel so mean and shabby when I drop down to earth again, and find myself a hard, selfish man of the world.

BEA.

Oh, I think there's a great deal of the martyr and saint and king in you.

SIR C.

Do you? I believe there is! I know there would be if you'd only screw me up to it—and keep me screwed up. Beatrice, there's nothing I couldn't do if you would only——

BEA.

(*Going away from him.*) Kit, you mustn't speak of this again. I can't quite forget.¹

¹ *Cross down L.
Sir C. follows
her.*

SIR C.

There's no need. While he was alive I never had one disloyal thought towards him. Now he's dead; who could be so fitted to take care of his dearest treasure as his oldest friend?

BEA.

(*Going away.*) I can't quite forget.

SIR C.

But you're young. What do you mean to do with your life?

BEA.

I'd some thoughts of entering a sisterhood.

SIR C.

Ah, no! Surely there are plenty of dear good ugly women in the world who can do that.

BEA.

But I must enjoy the luxury of self-sacrifice. Tell me how I can drink the deepest of that cup.

SIR C.

Marry me. I'll give you the most splendid opportunities. Now, if you and I were to join our forces, and take our poor Ned in hand, and——*

* *Curtain Warning.*

BEA.

Hush!

¹ *L. Crosses to R. reading letter.*

(FALKNER *re-enters*,¹ *evidently very much distracted.*)

SIR C.

(*After a little pause, goes up to him.*) Well, Ned, what are you going to do?

FALKNER.

(*In an agony of indecision.*) I don't know! I don't know!

SIR C.

You'll go, Ned? I'll go with you!

(*Enter LADY JESSICA at back.*)²

BEA.

You'll go, Ned?

LADY J.

Go? Where?

² *C. from L. Beatrice crosses to Falkner. When Lady Jessica speaks, Falkner's face changes from indecision to decision.*

FALKNER.¹

Nowhere. I shan't go, Kit. The man's waiting. I must give him my answer.

(*Exit L. LADY JESSICA looks after him. SIR CHRISTOPHER shrugs his shoulders at BEATRICE.*)

SIR C.²

Not all the king's horses, nor all the King's men.

CURTAIN.

(*Time—38 minutes.*)

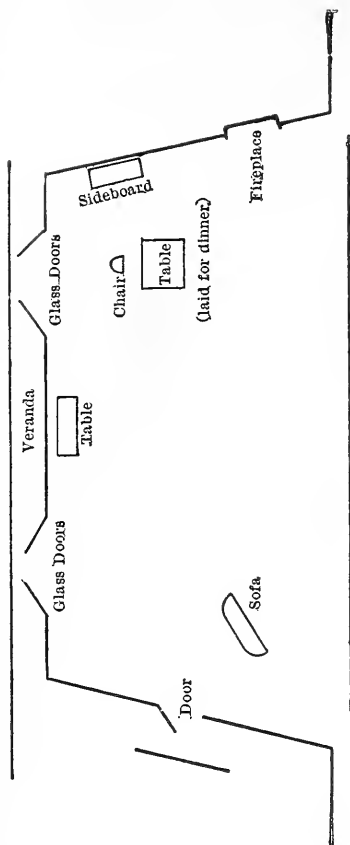
¹ *Crosses to L.*

² *Crosses to L.*

THE LIARS

ACT II

River and Scenery Back Cloth



ACT II.

SCENE:—*Private sitting-room in the Star and Garter, Shepperford-on-Thames, a room in a small high-class riverside hotel, furnished in the usual incongruous hotel fashion. Large French windows both right and left take up a good part of the back of the stage, and open upon a veranda which runs along outside. The pillars and roof of the veranda are smothered with trails of flowers and creeping plants. Beyond the veranda and very near to it is the Thames with opposite bank. Door down stage right. A sofa down stage right. A sideboard left. On the sideboard, plates, knives, forks, etc., dishes of fine peaches, grapes and strawberries, and a bottle each of hock, claret and champagne, as described in the text. A small table with writing materials at back between windows. A small table with white cloth laid, down stage, a little to the left of centre. A fireplace down stage left.*

(Discover FALKNER in evening dress and French Waiter.)

FALKNER.¹

Crème à La Reine. We might have some trifle before the soup.

WAITER.

Anchovy salad? Caviare?

* 1st call. Falkner, Waiter (2 menus). Lady Jessica (stylo. pen.)

¹ Waiter back of table, laying things. Falkner seated L. C.

FALKNER.

Caviare.

WAITER.¹

Bien, M'sieu. At what hour will m'sieu dine?

FALKNER.

I don't know; I'm not sure that my friend will come at all. But tell the cook to have everything prepared, so that we can have dinner very soon after my friend arrives.

WAITER.

Bien, m'sieu.

FALKNER.

(*Reading menu.*) Caviare. Crème à la Reine. Rouget à l'Italienne. Whitebait. Petites Timbales à la Lucullus. Mousse de Foies Gras en Belle Vue. Is your cook equal to those entrées?

WAITER.

Oh, sir, he is equal to anything. Trust to me, sir. The cook shall be magnifique. The dinner shall be magnifique.

FALKNER.

(*Continuing.*) Poulardes poêlées, sauce Arcadienne. Selle de Mouton. Ortolans. Salade. Asperges en Branches. Pouding Mousseline, sauce Eglantine. Soufflé Glacé à l'Ananas. Dessert. (*Waiter points to the dessert on the sideboard.*) And the wines?

WAITER.

(*Pointing to the wines on the sideboard.*) Ayala, seventy-five. Johannesburg, sixty-eight. Château Haut-Brion, seventy-five. I have brought them from London myself.² We have not these vintages here.

¹ *Writing on menu he has in his waistcoat.*

² *Crosses to R.*

FALKNER.

Good.

WAITER.

It is but one friend that m'sieu expect?

FALKNER.

Only one friend.

WAITER.

Bien, m'sieu.

¹ R.

(Exit.)¹

(FALKNER alone walks restlessly about the room for a few seconds, comes down; is arrested by something he hears outside the door, shows great delight.)

² R.

(Re-enter Waiter.)²

WAITER.

A lady; she say will Mr. Falkner please to see her? She have lost (coughing) her way.

FALKNER.

³ Waiter opens door R.

Show her in.³

(FALKNER alone walks eagerly about room for a few seconds; his manner very eager and impatient and quite different from what it had been before.

⁴ R.

(Re-enter Waiter,⁴ showing in LADY JESSICA most charmingly and coquettishly dressed in summer outdoor clothes. She comes in rather tempestuously, speaking as she enters, and going up to FALKNER.

LADY J.

(All in a breath.) Oh, my dear Mr. Falkner, I've been staying with my cousin, and I was walking to the station, and by some unlucky chance I must

have taken the wrong turning, for instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself here; and as I'm very hungry, would you think it very dreadful if I asked you to give me just a mere mouthful of dinner?

FALKNER.

(*Intensely calm low voice.*) I'm delighted. (To Waiter.) Will you let us have dinner as soon as it is ready?

WAITER.

In half an hour, sir.¹ And the friend, sir?

FALKNER.

The friend?

WAITER.

The friend that m'sieu expect—the friend of the dinner?

FALKNER.

Oh, yes—if he comes, show him in.

LADY J.

(*Alarmed.*) You don't expect——

FALKNER.

(*Glancing at Waiter.*) Hush!

WAITER.

(*Absolutely impassive face.*) Bien, m'sieu!

(*Exit.*)²

FALKNER.

I'm so glad you've come. Look. (*Holding out his hand.*) I'm trembling with delight. I knew you would be here.

LADY J.

I'm sure you didn't, for I didn't know myself

¹ Goes to door,
then returns.

² R.

two hours ago. It was only by chance that I happened to take the wrong turning.

FALKNER.

No; the right turning. And not by chance. It was not chance that brought you to me.

LADY J.

Oh, please, not that strain. I can't play up to it. Sit down and let us discuss something mundane—say dinner.¹

FALKNER.

(*Giving her the menu.*) I hope you'll like what I've ordered. I sent the waiter up to London for some of the dishes and the wines.

LADY J.

(*Takes menu, looks at it, shows symptoms of great mock terror.*) What? You surely don't expect my poor little appetite to stand up to this dinner. Oh, let me be a warning to all, never to take the wrong turning when it may lead to a menu like this.

FALKNER.

That's for your choice. You don't suppose I'd offer you anything but the very best.²

LADY J.

Yes, but a little of the very best is all I want; not all of it.

FALKNER.

Take all of it that I can set before you.

LADY J.

Oh, but think—there may be other deserving ladies in the world.

¹ *Lady Jess sits on sofa R., puts her gloves on head of sofa. Falkner gets menu from table L. C.*

² *Sits beside her.*

FALKNER.

There is but you.

LADY J.

(*Looks at him very much amused.*) And I came here to cure you of this folly. Ah, me! (*Reading the menu.*) Mousse de Foies Gras. Poulardes poêlées, sauce Arcadienne—what is sauce Arcadienne?

FALKNER.

I don't know. Love is the sauce of life. Perhaps it's that.¹

LADY J.

Yes, but don't dish it up too often or too strong. It's sure to be wasted.

FALKNER.

My love for you is not wasted.²

LADY J.

No?

FALKNER.

You'll return it. You'll love me at last.

LADY J.

Shall I? Crème à la Reine. Roguet à l'Italienne. And if I did what then?

FALKNER.³

Join your life to mine. Come to Africa with me.

LADY J.

(*Shakes her head.*) Impossible! We should only shock the British public. They wouldn't understand us. Ortolans. Salade. Asperges en Branches. Besides, what would everybody say?

¹ *About to take her hand. Lady Jess rises, crosses to L. C.*

² *Rising, crosses to C.*

³ *Going to her.*

FALKNER.

We shouldn't hear them.

LADY J.

No; but they'd be talking all the same. Ha, ha! They'd call us the eloping philanthropists.

FALKNER.

Would that matter?

LADY J.

Oh, yes. A philanthropist may not elope. A tenor may. Doesn't it show the terrible irony there is in the heart of things, that the best meaning philanthropist in the world may not elope with his neighbour's wife? Pouding Mousseline, sauce Eglantine. What makes you so eager to go hunting slave-traders in Africa? ¹

¹ *Sits L. C.*

FALKNER.

My father spent half his fortune putting slavery down. My grandfather spent half his life and died a pauper for the same cause.

LADY J.

Well then, you should send a subscription to the Aborigines' Protection Society. That is how I keep up our family traditions.

FALKNER.

How?

LADY J.

My father had a shocking reputation, and my grandfather, Beau Lillywhite—Oh! (*Shrug.*) So I follow in their footsteps—at a respectful distance. I flirt with you. Soufflé Glacé à l'Ananas. There's no flirting in Central Africa, I suppose?

FALKNER.

No flirting. Only heat and hunger and thirst, and helpless misery prolonged to a horrible death.

LADY J.

(*Genuinely moved.*) Oh, I'm so sorry! Don't think me heartless about *that*. Perhaps if I had lived amongst it as you have——

FALKNER.¹

¹ *Going close to her.*

Ah, if you had! you'd do as I ask you. You'd give all your heart to me, you'd give all your woman's care and tenderness to them, and you'd never hear one whisper of what people said of you.

LADY J.

(*Looking at him with real admiration.*) How earnest you are! How devoted! *

* *2nd call. George.*

(*Enter Waiter² with knives and forks; he goes to table and begins laying it.*)³

² *R.*
³ *Falkner crosses to R. C.*

LADY J.

(*To waiter.*) What is sauce Arcadienne?

WAITER.

Pardon! The cook is splendid. He is magnifique—but he has (*gesture*) renversée the sauce Arcadienne all over the shop.†

† *Warning Organ.*

FALKNER.

It doesn't matter.

LADY J.

Oh, I had set my heart on sauce Arcadienne.

FALKNER.

The cook must make some more sauce Arcadienne.

WAITER.

Ah, that is impossible till the middle of the night.

LADY J.

Ah, what a pity! It is the one thing I long for, sauce Arcadienne.

FALKNER.

Why?

LADY J.

Because I don't know what it is.

WAITER.

He will give you some sauce Marguerite.

LADY J.

What is sauce Marguerite?

WAITER.

(*All the while laying table.*) Ah, it is *delicieuse*. It is the very best sauce that is in all the world.

LADY J.

Va pour la sauce Marguerite!¹ Oh, this dinner! *

WAITER.²

Ah, there is the beast of the organ man.

LADY J.

No, let him be. I like music³—and monkeys.
(*To FALKNER.*) Tell them to make haste.

FALKNER.

Hurry the dinner.

WAITER.

Bien!

(*Exit.*)⁴

¹ *Puts menu on table.*

* *A barrel organ strikes up outside.*

² *Goes up L.*

³ *Waiter crosses R. C.*

⁴ *R.*

LADY J.

(*Taking out watch.*) Half-past seven, I've not an hour to stay.¹

FALKNER.

Yes, your life if you will.

LADY J.

Ah, no! You must be sensible. Think! what could come of it if I did love you? I should only break your heart or—what would be far worse—break my own.

FALKNER.

Break it then—or let me break it. It's better to feel, it's better to suffer, than to be meanly happy. I love you, but I'd rather smother you in tears and blood than you should go on living this poor little heartless, withered life, choked up with all this dry society dust. Oh, can't I make you feel? Can't I make you live? Can't I make you love me?

LADY J.

(*After a moment's pause, looking at him with great admiration.*) Perhaps I do in my heart of hearts!

FALKNER.

Ah!

(*Springs to seize her; she struggles with him.*)

LADY J.

Mr. Falkner! Mr. Falkner! If you please. Do you hear? Mr. Falkner! (*Tears herself free.*) Will you please go and stop that horrid organ?² Will you, please?

(*FALKNER bows, exit at door.*³ LADY JESSICA *panting, flurried, out of breath, goes up to the window*

¹ *Leans against chair L. C., facing Falkner.*

² *Falkner makes a movement towards her.*

³ *R. I. E.*

fanning herself with handkerchief, passes on to veranda, stays there for a few moments fanning herself, suddenly starts back alarmed, comes into room, stands frightened, listening. GEORGE NEPEAN appears on veranda, comes up to window, looks in.)

¹ R. C.

LADY J.¹

(Trying to appear indifferent.) Ah, George!

GEORGE.

I thought I caught sight of you. May I come in?

LADY J.

Certainly.

GEORGE.

Comes to her and shakes hands.

(Entering.) I'm not intruding?²

LADY J.

Intruding? Oh, no. Have you heard from Gilbert?

GEORGE.

Yes, I had a letter this morning. He may be back in two or three days.

LADY J.

(Embarrassed.) Yes?

* Stop Organ.

(A pause. The organ outside stops in the middle of a bar.)*

GEORGE.

² Crosses to fireplace, throws cigarette away.

(Glancing at table.) You're dining here?³

LADY J.

Yes; just a small party. What brings you here?

† 3rd call. Lady Rosamund. Freddie.

GEORGE.†

I was going on to some friends at Hersham. I

was waiting for the ferry when I caught sight of you. (*Glancing at table and sideboard.*) You're giving your friends rather a good dinner.

LADY J.

H'm, rather. I've heard the cooking's very good here. (*A little pause.*) There's a nest of cygnets outside. Have you seen them?

GEORGE.

No.

LADY J.

Do come and look at them; they are so pretty.

(*Going off at window followed by GEORGE when FALKNER enters at door. The two men look at each other. LADY JESSICA shows very great confusion and embarrassment. A long awkward pause. GEORGE looks very significantly at the sideboard and table.*)

GEORGE.

(*To LADY JESSICA.*) Gilbert must know of this. You understand?

(*Bows. Exit by window and veranda.*)¹

¹ L.

LADY J.

(*Who has stood very frightened and confused.*) Did you hear?² What can I do? What can I do?

² Crosses down L

FALKNER.

(*Calm, almost triumphant.*) You must join your life to mine now.

LADY J.

No, no! If you wish me ever to have one kind thought of you, get me out of this! Do something, find somebody to dine with us. Understand me, I

¹ *Crosses down R., turns, sits on sofa, looks after George.*

know myself, if this leads to a scandal, I shall hate you in a week.¹ Oh, do something! do something!

FALKNER.

Be calm. Be sure I'll do all I can to save you from a scandal. If that is impossible, be sure I'll do all I can to protect you from it.

LADY J.

Ah, no! Save me from it. I can't face it. I can't give up my world, my friends.² Oh, what can I do? I'll go back to town——

² *Rises, crosses L. C.*

FALKNER.

What good will that do? You had far better stay now.³ Sit down, be calm. Trust to me.

³ *Places chair L. C.*

⁴ *Sits L. C.*

LADY J.⁴

Oh, you are good, and I'm such a coward.

FALKNER.

Let us think what is the best thing to do.⁵

⁵ *Crosses to R.*

LADY J.

Can't we get somebody to dine with us?

LADY R.

(*Heard outside.*) Oh, can't you wait, Freddie?

⁶ *Rises.*

LADY J.⁶

(*Looking off.*) Hark! Rosy! (*Goes up to window.*)⁷

⁷ *L. C.*

FREDDIE.

(*Heard off.*) What! Row two more miles without a drink?

LADY J.

She's there in a boat with Freddie and another man. The men are landing. If we could only get

them to stay and dine with us! We must!¹ Go and find George Nepean and bring him back here. Make haste. When you come back, I'll have Rosy here.

FALKNER

In any case rely on me. I'm as firm as the earth beneath you.

(*Exit.*)²

LADY J.

(*Goes up to window.*)³ Rosy! Rosy! Come here! Yes, through there. Shush!

(*LADY ROSAMUND appears in the veranda.*)

LADY R.

Jess! What's the matter? (*Entering room.*)

LADY J.

Everything. You and Freddie must stay and dine here.⁴

LADY R.

We can't, we're going on to dine with Mrs. Crespin at her new place, and we've got Jack Symons with us.

LADY J.

Va pour Jack Symons, whoever he may be! He must stay and dine too!

LADY R.

Impossible. Mrs. Crespin has asked some people to meet us. As her place is on the river Jack proposed we should row down and dress there.⁵ What are you doing here? I thought you were at Barbara's.

¹ *Coming down a little. Falkner goes to her.*

² *R.*

³ *Jess at window waves handkerchief to attract Lady R.'s attention; very impatient at not being able to do so.*

⁴ *Lady R. enters R. C. The two come down C.*

⁵ *Looks round the room.*

LADY J.

I was going back to town to-night. I thought I'd walk to the station—it's so delightful across the fields. Well, you know the path, I went on all right till I came to those two turnings, and then—I must have taken the wrong one, for, instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself here.

LADY R.

Well?

LADY J.

I'd been wandering about for over an hour, I was very hungry; I remembered Mr. Falkner was staying here; so I came in and asked him to give me some dinner.

³ Goes to Jess.

LADY R.¹

It was very foolish of you! *

LADY J.

Yes, especially as George Nepean was waiting for the ferry and caught sight of me on the veranda.

LADY R.

George Nepean!

LADY J.

He came in, saw Mr. Falkner, put a totally wrong construction on it all, and threatened to let Gilbert know.

LADY R.

How could you be so imprudent, Jess? You must have known that——

LADY J.

Oh, don't stand there rowing me. Help me out of this and I promise you I won't get into another.

LADY R.

Why didn't you explain to George how it happened?

LADY J.

So I would. Only when he came in I was alone. I felt sure he would put a wrong construction on it, so I told him I was dining here with a little party ¹—then Mr. Falkner came in, and I was too confused to say anything. Besides, I couldn't very well tell him the truth, because——

¹ *Lady R. moves
down R.*

LADY R.

Because what?

LADY J.

Well, it's very curious, but the last time I was staying with Barbara the very same thing happened.

LADY R.

What?

LADY J.

I was walking to the station, and I must have taken the wrong turning, for, instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself here.

LADY R.

What, twice?

LADY J.

Yes.

LADY R.

Oh, impossible!

LADY J.

No, it isn't; for it actually happened.

LADY R.

Do you mean to tell me that you——

LADY J.

(*Taking her up on the "tell."*) Yes, I do. The sign-post is most deceptive.

LADY R.

It must be.

LADY J.

But the other time it was really a mistake, and I dined here all alone.

LADY R.

Honour? ¹

LADY J.

Really, really honour!

LADY R.

I cannot imagine how you, a woman of the world——

LADY J.

Oh, do not nag me. Mr. Falkner has gone for George. You must stay here and tell George you are dining with me.

LADY R.

What about Freddie and Jack? See if they've come back to the boat.

LADY J.

(*Looking off at window.*)² Not yet. Here's Mr. Falkner—alone.

(*Re-enter FALKNER at window.*)³

Well, where is he?

FALKNER.⁴

(*To LADY ROSAMUND.*) How d'ye do? (*To*

¹ Goes to her,
turns her
round.

² Window on L.
C., comes down
L. C.

³ R. C.

⁴ Shakes hands.

LADY JESSICA.) He took a fly that was waiting outside and drove to the post-office. I went there and made inquiries. He stopped, sent off a telegram——

LADY J.

That must have been to Gilbert.

FALKNER

Then he drove off towards Staines. Shall I follow him?

LADY J.

Yes. No. What's the use? He may be anywhere by this.

LADY R.

Besides we can't stay to dinner.¹

¹ *Falkner goes up to window L. C.*

LADY J.

You must—you must! I must be able to tell Gilbert that somebody dined with me.

LADY R.

Jess, I'll write to George when I get back to-night, and tell him that I dined with you here.²

² *Crosses to Jess. They kiss.*

LADY J.

Oh, you good creature! No! Write now, on the hotel paper. Then he'll see you were actually here.

LADY R.

Pens, ink, and paper.³

³ *Taking her gloves.*

FALKNER.

(*At table up stage.*) Here!

(LADY ROSAMUND.)⁴

⁴ *Up R. C.*

LADY J.

Rosy, I've got a better plan than that.

LADY R.

What?

LADY J.

Could you be in town to-morrow morning?

LADY R.

Yes—why?

LADY J.

Write to George to call on you there. I'll drop in a little before he comes. Then we can see what frame of mind he is in, and explain things accordingly.¹ We can manage him so much better between us.

¹ *Very delighted at the idea.*

LADY R.

² *Sits at table R. C.*

Very well, make haste.² Mr. Falkner, will you go into the bar, run up against my husband and his friend, and keep them busy there till I get back into the boat?

FALKNER.

Very well.

³ *R. 1. E. Lady Jess goes up L. C.*

(*Exit.*)³

LADY R.

Now, what shall I say?

LADY J.

(*Dictating.*) "My dear George"—

LADY R.

(*Writing.*) "My dear George"—Oh, this pen!
(*Throws away the pen, takes up another, tries it.*)

LADY J.

We must make it very short and casual as if you didn't attach much importance to it.

LADY R.

(*Throws away second pen.*) That's as bad!

LADY J.

(*Taking out a gold stylograph, giving it to LADY ROSAMUND.*) Here's my stylograph. Take care of it. It was a birthday present.

LADY R.

"Monday evening. My dear George"—

(*Dictating.*) "Jess has told me that you have just been here and that you were surprised at her presence. She fears you may have put a wrong construction on what you saw. She was too flurried at the moment to explain. But if you will call on me to-morrow morning, at Cadogan Gardens at"—what time will suit you?

LADY R.

Twelve?

LADY J.

Yes, and I'll be there a few minutes before.*

LADY R.

(*Writing.*) "Twelve."

LADY J.

(*Dictating.*) "I will give you a full explanation. You will then see how very simple the whole affair was, and how little cause you had for your suspicions of her." That will do, won't it?

* 4th call.
Waiter,
Ferris.

LADY R.

Yes, I think. "Yours sincerely"—no, "Yours affectionately, Rosy."

LADY J.

"P.S. You had perhaps better say nothing about this to Gilbert until after we have met. When you see how trifling the matter is, you can tell Gilbert or not, as you please."

LADY R.

(*Writing.*) "As you please. George Nepean, Esquire." What's his number?

LADY J.

Two-twenty.

LADY R.

(*Writing.*) "Two-twenty, Sloane Street."

LADY J.

What about Freddie? Shall we tell him?

LADY R.

Oh, no! I wouldn't trust my Freddie in a matter of this kind. He'd put a wrong construction on it—men always do. (*Puts letter in envelope, seals it.*)

LADY J.

But if George asks him?

LADY R.

Freddie won't come up to town to-morrow. We'll see how George takes it, and we'll keep Freddie out of it, if we can. (*She has risen, leaving stylograph on writing-table, where it remains. She seals letter.*) Stamp?

LADY J.

I've got one in my purse.¹

LADY R.

(*Has caught sight of the menu, has taken it up.*)
Jess, you'll go straight to the station now?

LADY J.

Yes, I'm awfully hungry——

LADY R.

Yes, but I don't think this dinner would agree with you. (*Puts the menu down significantly.*)

LADY J.

Very well. But I am hungry.

LADY R.²

And Jess, if I get you out of this—you won't take the wrong turning again?

² *Going to Lady Jess.*

LADY J.

No! no!

LADY R.

Honour?

LADY J.

Honour! Really honour! Rosy, you know this is only a silly freak—nothing more.

LADY R.

I may be sure of that, Jess? Honour?

LADY J.

Honour! Really, really honour!

LADY R.

(*Kisses her.*) I must be going. To-morrow!³

³ *Goes to window R. C. Jess rings bell on flat C.*

LADY J.

To-morrow at Cadogan Gardens, ten minutes to twelve.

LADY R.

(*At window.*) Those men are in the boat. My Freddie is looking for me. What shall I tell him?

¹ R. C.

(*Exit at window.*)¹

² R. L. E.

(*Enter Waiter.*)²

LADY J.

(*Giving letter.*) Please get that posted at once.

WAITER.

(*Taking letter.*) Bien, madame. (*Exit with letter.*)³

⁴ R. L. E.

⁵ R. C.

(*Re-enter FALKNER at window.*)⁴

LADY J.

They've gone? ⁵

⁶ Coming down to chair L. C.

FALKNER.

⁷ Throws hat on chair R.

Yes. What have you done? ⁶

LADY J.

Rosy has written to George to come and see her to-morrow morning at Cadogan Gardens. You had better come too.

FALKNER.

At what time?

LADY J.

Say a quarter to one. George will have gone by then and we can tell you if he accepts our explanation.

FALKNER.

What is the explanation to be?

⁸ Ticking on her fingers.

LADY J.⁷

That Rosy and I were dining together here, that she hadn't arrived, that you happened to come into

the room, and that George saw you and put a wrong construction on it. That will be all right, won't it?

FALKNER.

Yes—I daresay. I wish it had been possible to tell the truth.

LADY J.

The truth? What truth? Rosy was actually here, and she *might* have stayed and dined with me—only she didn't—and—well, if it isn't the truth, it's only a little one.

FALKNER.

I think those things are all the same size.

LADY J.

Oh, please don't be disagreeable, just at our last moment too.

FALKNER.

Our last moment! Ah, no, no, no! (*Approaching her.*)

LADY J.

Ah, yes, yes, yes! I promised Rosy I'd go straight to the station——

FALKNER.

There's no train till eight fifty.¹ What harm can there be in your staying to dinner now?

¹ Falkner crosses to back of chair L. C., places it for her.

LADY J.

I promised Rosy I wouldn't.² I'm fearfully hungry——

² Picks up menu

(*Enter Waiter* ³ *with letter on salver.*)

³ R.

WAITER.

(*Advancing with letter on salver to LADY JESSICA.*) Pardon, is this letter for madame?

LADY J.

(*Takes letter, shows fright.*) Yes. Excuse me. Who brought it? (*Opens letter, takes out telegram.*)

WAITER.

She is here in the passage.

LADY J.

(*Opens telegram; shows great alarm. Calls.*) Ferris.

FERRIS.

(*Coming to door.*) Yes, my lady.

LADY J.

Come in.

WAITER.

¹ R.

Bien, madame. (*Exit.*)¹

LADY J.

When did this telegram come?

FERRIS.

This afternoon, my lady. The moment I got in, Mr. Rawlins said to me, "Mr. Nepean is coming back to-night; I've just had a telegram from him to get his room ready. And I expect this telegram is for her ladyship," he said, and he gave me that telegram, and I said, "I expect it is." "What time will her ladyship be back to-night?" he said. "I don't know," I said. "Where is her ladyship now?" he said. "I don't know," I said.*

* 5th Call Sir Christopher.

LADY J.

You didn't know?

FERRIS.

No, my lady.

LADY J.

Then why did you come here?

FERRIS.

(*Confused.*) The other night when I was bringing your ladyship's shawl to the tent, I happened to hear you mention this hotel.¹ I didn't think anything of it, your ladyship, and I didn't in the least expect to find you here, I assure your ladyship. But I thought your ladyship would like to be apprised that Mr. Nepean was coming home to-night, and so I came, as I may say by pure chance, my lady; just as you might have come yourself, my lady.

¹ *Lady Jess and Falkner exchange looks.*

LADY J.

Quite right, Ferris. (*To FALKNER.*) Mr. Nepean is coming home to-night. He reaches Paddington at ten.

FERRIS.

I've got a cab outside, my lady, and I've looked out the trains. If we make haste, we can drive over to Walton and just catch a train there. But we haven't a moment to spare.

LADY J.

Come then.²

² *Takes gloves from sofa.*

FERRIS.

I hope I've done right, my lady?

LADY J.

Quite right, Ferris. No. Please don't trouble to come out, I'd rather you didn't. Rosy and I will dine with you some other night. (*Exit FERRIS.*)³ Good-night.

³ *R.*

FALKNER.⁴

⁴ *Going to Lady Jess.*

And to-morrow?

LADY J.

To-morrow? (*Grimace.*) Petits rows conjugals
sauce tartare.

(*Exit at door.*)¹

(*Enter Waiter with two little morsels of Caviare.*)²

FALKNER.

What's that?

WAITER.

Caviare on toast, sir.

FALKNER.

Hang the caviare. Bring in the soup.

WAITER.

Ah, it is not yet ready, two, three minutes. I
am very sorry, but the cook say the sauce Margue-
rite——

FALKNER.

What about it?

WAITER.

It will not be made.

FALKNER.

Very well.

WAITER.

And the salade?

FALKNER.

What about the salad?

WAITER.

Will m'sieu mix it?³

FALKNER.

No; mix it yourself.

WAITER.

Bien, m'sieu.⁴

¹ *Exit door R.*
Falkner goes to
door, looks
after her,
slams it, kicks
his sock sav-
agely, goes up
to window L. C.
² *Crosses to side-*
board L., puts
tray down, and
places caviare
on table L. C.

³ *Picks up tray.*

⁴ *Going off R.*

FALKNER.

Waiter!

WAITER.

Sir!¹

¹ Stops R. C.

FALKNER.

(*Pointing to the cover laid for LADY JESSICA.*)
Take those confounded things away.

WAITER.

Sir!

FALKNER.

Take those confounded things away; I'm going to dine alone.

WAITER.

Bien, m'sieu.

(*Takes up the things, the second cover, and the one plate of caviare, leaving the other on the table in FALKNER'S place. Is going off with them.*)

FALKNER.

Bring in the soup.

WAITER.

Bien, m'sieu.

(*Exit with things.*² SIR CHRISTOPHER'S voice heard outside.)

² Leaving door open.

SIR C.

Mr. Falkner?

WAITER.

Yes, sir. In number ten, sir.

SIR C.

Has he dined?

WAITER.

Not yet, sir. What name, sir?

SIR. C.

Oh never mind my name. Show me in.

WAITER.

(*At door, announcing.*) The friend of the dinner.

¹ R.

(*Enter SIR CHRISTOPHER in morning dress.*)¹

² R. *Sir C. goes*
C. *Falkner is*
L. C.

(*Exit Waiter.*)²

SIR. C.

(*Very cordially.*) Ah, dear old boy, here you are. (*Shaking hands cordially.*) All alone?

FALKNER.

(*Very sulky.*) Yes.

SIR. C.

(*Looking at table.*) You haven't dined?

FALKNER.

No.

SIR. C.

That's all right. I'll join you. What's the matter?

FALKNER.

Nothing.

SIR. C.

Nothing?

FALKNER.

(*Very sulky throughout.*) No. What should be?

SIR. C.

You look upset.

FALKNER.

³ *Crosses to R.*
Sir C. throws
hat on sofa R.

Not at all.³

SIR. C.

That's all right. (*Going up to table very ravenously.*) I say, old chap, dinner won't be long, eh?

FALKNER.

No, why?

SIR. C.

I'm famished. I was over at Hounslow, I had no end of work to get through, so I stuck to it. I've had nothing but a biscuit and a glass of sherry since breakfast. I was going up to town for dinner, then I remembered you wrote to me from here; so I thought I'd run over on the chance of finding you. And here you are. (*Cordially.*) Well, how are you?

FALKNER.

I'm very well.

SIR. C.

That's all right. And, and—old fellow—about the lady?

FALKNER.

What about her?

SIR. C.

You're going to behave like a good true fellow and give her up, eh?

FALKNER.

Yes, I suppose.

SIR. C.

That's all right. Love 'em, worship 'em, make the most of 'em! Go down on your knees every day and thank God for having sent them into this dreary world for our good and comfort. But, don't break your heart over 'em! Don't ruin your career for

'em! Don't lose a night's rest for 'em! They're not worth it—except one! (*Very softly.*)

FALKNER.

(*Same sulky mood.*) You're full of good advice.

SIR. C.

It's the only thing I am full of. I say, old fellow, could you hurry them up with the dinner?

(*FALKNER goes and rings bell.*)

SIR. C.

(*Casually taking up the menu.*) No, Ned; they're not worth it, bless their hearts. And the man who—(*Suddenly stops, his face illuminated with delighted surprise.*) Ned!

FALKNER.

What? ¹

SIR. C.

(*Pointing to menu.*) This isn't the menu for tonight?

FALKNER.

Yes.

SIR. C.

(*Incredulously.*) No! Dear old fellow! (*Looking at him with great admiration.*) Dear old fellow! I say, Ned, you do yourself very well when you're all alone.

FALKNER.

Why shouldn't I?

SIR. C.

Why shouldn't you? Why shouldn't you?
(*Perusing menu.*)

^a Warn.
^a Curtain.
^b Organ.

¹ Coming down
R. C.

FALKNER.

Why shouldn't I? Excuse me a moment.

(Exit at door. SIR CHRISTOPHER, left alone, reads over the menu, showing great satisfaction, then goes up to sideboard, takes up the bottles of wine, looks at them, shows great satisfaction, rubs his hands, brings down champagne, places it R. of table, ditto hock, places it L. of table, brings down claret, looks at brand, hugs it delightedly; sits on table up C., puts claret down, picks up stylo. pen, reads inscription, coming down, then goes to window L. C., looks off, gives a sigh, comes down, puts pen in waistcoat pocket. Enter Waiter.)

WAITER.

(Putting soup on table.) Mr. Falkner says will you please excuse him? He has gone to London just now, this minute.

SIR C.

Gone to London! ¹

¹ Coming close to table L. C.

WAITER.

On very important business. He say will you please make yourself at home with the dinner? ²

SIR C.

² Takes lid of tureen, puts ladle in soup.

(Puzzled.) Gone to London! What on earth — ³ *(Resolutely and instantly takes seat at head of table.)* Serve up the dinner! Sharp!

³ Catches scent of soup, gives two good sniffs, becomes ravenous.

WAITER.

Caviare on toast?

SIR C.

Oh, damn the caviare! Open the champagne!

(Takes the morsel of caviare and throws it down

his throat; helps himself to soup, peppers it vigorously, meantime Waiter opens champagne and pours out a glass.

SIR C.

The fish! Quick! and the entrées, bring them both up at the same time—bring up the whole bag of tricks!!

(SIR CHRISTOPHER *throws spoonful after spoonful of soup down his throat. The organ outside strikes up in the middle of the bar at which it left off, a very rowdy street tune.*

CURTAIN.

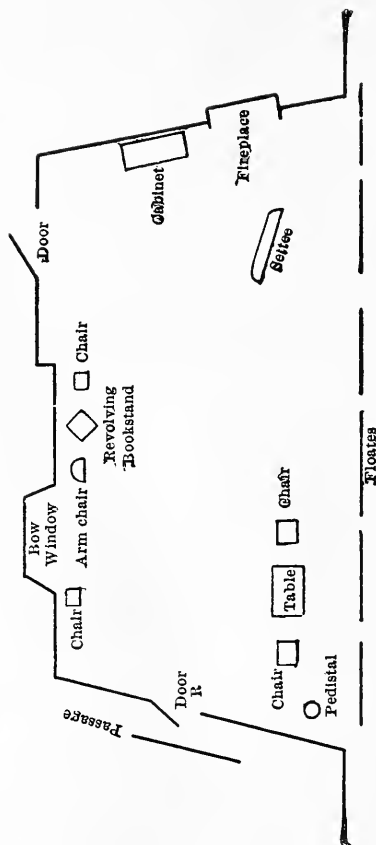
(*Time—24 minutes.*)

THE LIARS

ACT III

Garden Cloth

Passage



ACT III.

SCENE: LADY ROSAMUND's drawing-room, Cadogan Gardens, a very elegant modern apartment, furnished in good taste. Door at back. Door right. Large bow window forming an alcove up stage right. Fireplace left. LADY ROSAMUND discovered in out-door morning dress. Footman showing in LADY JESSICA at back.

* 1st call. Lady Rosamond, Footman, Freddie, Lady Jessica, (letter), Sir Christopher, (stylo. pen).

FOOTMAN. (*Announces.*)¹

* L.

Lady Jessica Nepean. (*Exit Footman.*)²

* L.

LADY R.

Well, dear?

LADY J.

(*Kisses LADY ROSAMUND very affectionately.*)
Oh, Rosy——

LADY R.

What's the matter?

LADY J.

Directly you had gone Ferris came in with a telegram from Gilbert, saying he was coming home last night. Of course I flew back to town. When I got there I found a later telegram saying he hadn't been able to finish his business, and that he would come back to-day.

LADY R.

(*Taking letter from pocket.*) He reaches Paddington at twelve.

LADY J.

How do you know?

LADY R.

(*Giving letter.*) Read that.

LADY J.

(*Looking at handwriting.*) From George Nepean.

LADY R.

Yes. He came here an hour ago to see me, and left that note. I'm afraid George means to be very horrid.

LADY J.

(*Reading.*) "Dear Lady Rosamund, I shall, of course, be quite ready to listen to any explanation you may have to offer. I will come back to Cadogan Gardens on my return from Paddington. I am now on my way there to meet Gilbert, who arrives from Devon at twelve. It is only fair to tell you that on leaving Lady Jessica last evening I telegraphed him I had a most serious communication to make to him,¹ and that on his arrival I shall tell him exactly what I saw." George does mean to be horrid. (*Retaining letter.*)

¹ Looks at Lady R.

LADY R.

I cannot imagine how you——

LADY J.

Oh, do not preach. I tell you it was the signpost. It is most deceptive.

LADY R.

It must be. The next time you come to that sign-post——

LADY J.

I shall know which turning to take! You needn't fear.

LADY R.

My Freddie's in a small fever.¹

¹ *Crosses down R.*

LADY J.

What about?

LADY R.

My coming up to town this morning.

LADY J.

You're sure he'll stay down there? He won't come up and—interfere?

LADY R.²

² *Crosses to C.*

Oh no, poor old dear! I snubbed him thoroughly and left him grizzling in his tent, like Achilles. He'll stay there all day, fuming and trying to screw up his courage to have a tremendous row with me when I get back to dinner this evening. I know my Freddie so well!³

³ *Crosses down R.*

(FREDDIE *saunters in at back, half timid, half defiant.*)

(*Looking at him with amused surprise.*) Hillo, my friend! Hillo!

FREDDIE.

(*Very severe and dignified, takes no notice of her.*) How do, Jess?⁴

⁴ *Lady Jess. looks annoyed at Lady R. Lady Jess sits R. C.*

(LADY JESSICA *alternately reads GEORGE's letter and looks at FREDDIE.*)

¹ *Crossing to him.*

LADY R.¹

What has brought you to town?

FREDDIE.

I came up with a purpose.

LADY R.

Oh, don't say that. People are always so horrid who do things with a purpose.

FREDDIE.

I came up with Mrs. Crespin. She has lost the address of the cook that you gave her last evening. I told her you were in town. She will call here for it.

LADY R.

(*Sweetly.*) Very well.

FREDDIE.

Do you intend to stay in, or go out this morning?

LADY R.

That depends. I may stay in—or I may go out. What are you going to do?

FREDDIE.

That depends. I may stay in—or—I may go out.

LADY R.

Very well, dear, do as you please. I'll take the alternative. (*To LADY JESSICA.*) Come and take your things off in my room.

² *Rising.*

LADY J.²

(*Glancing at FREDDIE.*) But don't you think——

FREDDIE.¹

(*With great dignity.*) I have come up to town this morning, because for the future I intend to place everything in this house on a new basis, an entirely opposite basis from that on which it now stands.

¹ *Folding his arms, and facing Lady R. defiantly.*

LADY R.²

You're going to turn all the furniture upside down! Oh, I wouldn't!

² *Looking round room.*

FREDDIE.

Hitherto I have been content to be a cipher in this establishment. I will be a cipher no longer.

LADY R.

No, I wouldn't Come along, Jess!³

LADY J.

³ *Going to door. Lady Jess shows George's letter.*

But——

LADY R.

We'll talk it over upstairs. Run away to your club, Freddie, and think over what figure you would like to be. I daresay we can arrange it.

(*Exit LADY ROSAMUND, R., taking off LADY JESSICA, and closing the door rather sharply behind her.*)

FREDDIE.

(*Left alone, marches up to the door, calls out in a forcible-feeble scream.*) I will not be a cipher! I will not be a cipher! (*Comes to centre of stage, gesticulates, his lips moving, sits down very resolutely, and then says in a tone of solemn conviction*) I will not be a cipher!⁴

⁴ *Sits R. C.*

(*Enter Footman announcing.*)⁵

⁵ *L. Freddie rises.*

FOOTMAN.

Sir Christopher Deering!

(*Enter* SIR CHRISTOPHER.)

(*Exit* Footman.)

SIR C.

(*Shaking hands.*) I've just come on from Lady Jessica's. They told me I should find her here.

FREDDIE.

She's upstairs with my wife.

SIR C.

Can I see her for a few minutes?

FREDDIE.

I don't know. Deering, old fellow, we're tiled in, aren't we? If I ask your advice——

SIR C.

Certainly, Freddie. What is it?

FREDDIE.

I've been married for seven years——

SIR C.

Seven years is it? It doesn't seem so long.

FREDDIE.

Oh, doesn't it? Yes, it does. Rosy and I have never quite hit it off from the first.

SIR C.

No? How's that?

FREDDIE.

I don't know. When I want to do anything, she doesn't. When I want to go anywhere she won't.

When I like anybody, she hates them. And when I hate anybody, she likes them. And—well—there it is in a nutshell.

SIR C.

Hum! I should humour her a little, Freddie—let her have her own way. Try kindness.

FREDDIE.

Kindness? I tell you this, Deering, kindness is a grand mistake. And I made that grand mistake at starting. I began with riding her on the snaffle. I ought to have started on the curb, eh?

SIR C.

Well, there's something to be said for that method in some cases. Kindness won't do, you say? Why not try firmness?

FREDDIE.

I have.

SIR C.

Well?

FREDDIE.

Well, firmness is all very well, but there's one great objection to firmness.

SIR C.

What's that?

FREDDIE.

It leads to such awful rows, and chronic rowing does upset me so. After about two days of it, I feel so seedy and shaky and nervous,¹ I don't know what to do so. (*Has a sudden wrathful outburst.*)² And she comes up as smiling as ever!

SIR C.

Poor old fellow!

¹ *Sits R. C.*

² *Thumps table.*

FREDDIE.

I say, Deering, what would you advise me to do?

SIR C.

Well, it requires some consideration——

FREDDIE.

(*With deep conviction.*) You know, Deering, there must be some way of managing them.

SIR C.

One would think so. There must be some way of managing them!

FREDDIE.

(*Has another wrathful outburst.*) And I used to go and wait outside her window, night after night, for hours! What do you think of that?

SIR C.

I should say it was time very badly laid out.

FREDDIE.

(*Pursuing his reminiscences.*) Yes, and caught a chill on my liver and was laid up for six weeks.

SIR C.

Poor old fellow!

FREDDIE.¹

I say, Deering, what would you do?

SIR C.

Well—well—it requires some consideration.

FREDDIE.

(*Walking about.*) You know, Deering, I may be an ass——²

SIR C.

Oh!

¹ *Rises.*

² *Crosses to L.*

FREDDIE.

(*Firmly.*) Yes. I may be an ass, but I'm not a *silly* ass. I may be a fool, but I'm not a *d—ce—d* fool! Now there's something going on this morning between Rosamund and Jess. They're hobnobbing and whispering, and when two of 'em get together——

SIR C.

Oh, my dear fellow, when two women get together, do you think it can ever be worth a man's while to ask what nonsense or mischief they're chattering? By the way, did you say that I could see Lady Jessica?

FREDDIE.¹

¹ *Crosses to R.*

She's upstairs with Rosy. I'll send her to you. Deering, if you were married, would you be a cipher in your own house?

SIR C.

Not if I could help it.²

² *Taking off gloves.*

FREDDIE.

(*Very determinedly.*) Neither will I.

(*Exit.*)³

³ *R.*

(*SIR CHRISTOPHER, left alone, takes out the stylograph and looks at it carefully. In a few seconds enter LADY JESSICA, R. As she enters he drops left hand which holds the stylograph.*)

SIR C.

How d'ye do?⁴

⁴ *Shaking hands.*

LADY J.

How d'ye do? You wish to see me?

(*SIR CHRISTOPHER presents the stylograph, LADY JESSICA shows alarm.*)

SIR C.

I see from the inscription that this belongs to you.

LADY J.

(*Taking stylograph.*) Where did you find it?

SIR C.

In a private sitting-room at the Star and Garter at Shepperford.

LADY J.

I must have left it there some time ago. I could not imagine where I had lost it. Thank you so much.

SIR C.

Pray don't mention it. (*An awkward pause.*)
Good morning.¹

¹ *Moving up L.*

LADY J.

Good morning. (SIR CHRISTOPHER *has got to door at back.*) Sir Christopher—(SIR CHRISTOPHER *stops.*) You were at Shepperford——? ²

² *Sir C. comes down C.*

SIR C.

Last evening.

LADY J.

Pretty little spot.

SIR C.

Charming.

LADY J.

And a very good hotel?

SIR C.

First class. Such splendid cooking!

LADY J.

The cooking's good, is it?—oh, yes, I dined there once, some time ago.

SIR C.

I dined there last night.

LADY J.

Did you? At the table d'hôte?

SIR C.

No, in a private sitting-room. Number ten.

LADY J.

With a friend, I suppose?

SIR C.

No. All alone.

LADY J.

All alone? In number ten?

SIR C.

All alone. In number ten.

LADY J.

I suppose you—I suppose——

SIR C.

Suppose nothing except that I had a remarkably good dinner, that I picked up that stylograph and brought it up to town with me last night. And there is an end of the whole matter, I assure you. Good morning.¹

¹ *Going L.*

LADY J.

Good morning. Sir Christopher—you—(SIR CHRISTOPHER *is again arrested at door.*) you—a——² I may trust you?

² *Sir C. comes down C. R.*

SIR C.

If I can help you—yes.

LADY J.

Nothing—nothing is known about my being there?

SIR C.

Your being there?

LADY J.

(*After a pause—embarrassed.*) I was to have dined in number ten.

SIR C.

All alone?

LADY J.

(*Same embarrassed manner.*) No—with Mr. Falkner. I was coming up to town from my cousin's. I started to walk to the station. I must have taken the wrong turning, for instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself at the Star and Garter. I was very hungry and I asked Mr. Falkner to give me a mere mouthful of dinner.

SIR C.

A mere mouthful.

LADY J.

And then George Nepean caught sight of me, came in, saw Mr. Falkner, and telegraphed my husband that I—of course Gilbert will believe the worst, and I—oh, I don't know what to do!

SIR C.

Can I be of any service? *

LADY J.

How would you advise me to—to get out of it?

* 2nd call. Lady
Rosamond.
Freddie.

SIR C.

Let us go over the various possibilities of the case.
There are only two.

LADY J.

What are they?

SIR C.

Possibility number one—get out of it by telling
fibs.¹ Possibility number two—get out of it by tell-
ing the truth.² Why not possibility number two?

¹ *Lady Jess. nods.*

² *Lady Jess.
shakes her
head.*

LADY J.

Oh, I couldn't!

SIR C.

Couldn't what?

LADY J.

Tell my husband that I was going to dine with
Mr. Falkner.

SIR C.

But it was quite by accident?

LADY J.

Oh, quite!³

SIR C.

Eh!

LADY J.

Quite!

SIR C.

Well——?

LADY J.

But if Gilbert made inquiries——

SIR C.

Well?

LADY J.

It was such a very good dinner that Mr. Falkner
ordered.

³ *He looks at her.
She becomes
confused.*

SIR C.

It was! But, if he didn't expect you, why did he order that very excellent dinner?

LADY J.

I'm sure you ought to be the last person to ask that, for it seems you ate it.

SIR C.

I did.

LADY J.

It's an ill wind that blows nobody good!

SIR C.

I'm not grumbling at the wind, or at the dinner, but if I'm to help you out of this, you had better tell me all the truth. Especially as I'm not your husband. Now frankly, is this a mere indiscretion or——¹

¹ *Looking at her.*

LADY J.

A mere indiscretion, nothing more. Honour—really, really honour.

SIR C.

A mere indiscretion that will never be repeated.

LADY J.

A mere indiscretion that will never be repeated. You believe me?

SIR C.

(*Looking at her.*) Yes, I believe you, and I'll help you.

LADY J.

Thank you! Thank you!

SIR C.

Now did Falkner expect you?²

² *Lady Jess. makes two efforts to answer him.*

LADY J.

He ought not.

SIR C.

He ought not. But he did.

LADY J.

I told him I shouldn't come.

SIR C.

Which was exactly the same as telling him you would.

LADY J.

Have you seen Mr. Falkner?

SIR C.

Only for a minute just before dinner. He came up to town.

LADY J.

Without any dinner?

SIR C.

Without any dinner. To come back to these two possibilities.

LADY J.

Yes, Rosy and I have decided on—on——

SIR C.

On possibility number one, tell a fib. I put that possibility first out of natural deference and chivalry towards ladies. The only objection I have to telling fibs is that you get found out.

LADY J.

Oh, not always.¹

SIR C.

Eh!

LADY J.

I mean, if you arrange things not perhaps exactly as they were, but as they ought to have been.

¹ *Lady Jess. becomes embarrassed.*

SIR C.

I see. In that way a lie becomes a sort of idealized and essential truth——

LADY J.

Yes. Yes——

SIR C.

I'm not a good hand at—idealizing.

LADY J.

Ah, but then you're a man! No, I can't tell the truth. Gilbert would never believe me. Would you—after that dinner?

SIR C.

The dinner would be some tax on my digestion.

(LADY ROSAMUND enters R., followed by FREDDIE, with a self-important and self-assertive air.¹)

LADY R.

Good morning, Sir Christopher.

SIR C.

(*Shaking hands.*) Good morning, Lady Rosamund.

LADY R.

Jess, I've had to tell Freddie.

LADY J.

And I've had to tell Sir Christopher. He was at Shepperford last evening, and he has promised to help us.

FREDDIE.

I must say, Jess, that I think you have behaved—well—in a—confounded silly way.

* 3rd call. Footman, Mrs. Crespin.

¹ Sir C. crosses to Lady R. Jess. goes down L. Freddie in front of table R. C. Lady R. above table R. C. Sir C. C.

LADY J.

That is perfectly understood.

FREDDIE.

(*Solemnly.*) When a woman once forgets what is due——

LADY J.

Oh, don't moralize! Rosy, Sir Christopher, do ask him not to improve the occasion.¹

¹ *Puts stylo. pen on her chain.*

SIR C.

The question is, Freddie, whether you will help us in getting Lady Jessica out of this little difficulty.

FREDDIE.

Well, I suppose I must join in.

LADY J.

Now, Rosy, do you fully understand——

SIR C.

I don't think I do. What is the exact shape which Possibility Number One has taken—or is going to take?²

LADY R.

² *Lady Jess about to answer. Lady R. takes it up.*

Jess and I had arranged to have a little *tête-à-tête* dinner at Shepperford. Jess got there first. I hadn't arrived. George saw Jess at the window, and came in. At that moment Mr. Falkner happened to come into the room, and Jess knowing that appearances were against her, was confused, and couldn't on the spur of the moment give the right explanation.³

³ *Ladies and Freddie look very satisfied. Sir C. dubious.*

SIR C.

I suppose the waiter will confirm that right explanation?⁴

⁴ *They look at each other alarmed. Sir C. turns up C.*

LADY J.

The waiter? I hadn't thought of that. Waiters will confirm anything, won't they? Couldn't you settle with the waiter?

SIR C.

Well, I——

LADY J.

You did have the dinner, you know!

SIR C.

Very well. I'll settle with the waiter.

(Enter Footman.)¹

FOOTMAN

(Announcing.) Mrs. Crespin!²

(Enter MRS. CRESPIN.)

(Exit Footman.)

MRS. C.

(Shows a little surprise at seeing them all, then goes very affectionately to LADY ROSAMUND.) Good morning dear. Good morning, Sir Christopher.³ (SIR CHRISTOPHER bows. To FREDDIE.) I've seen you. (Goes to LADY JESSICA.) Good morning, dearest. (Kisses her.)

LADY J.

Good morning, dearest. (Kisses her.)

MRS. C.

(To LADY JESSICA. Looking anxiously at her.) You're looking pale and worried.

¹ L.
² Sir C. cautions Lady Jess by putting his fingers to his lips. Freddie turns up C.

³ Sir C. joins Freddie up C.

LADY J.

Me? Oh no, I'm sure I don't, do I?

SIR C.

Not to masculine eyes.

MRS. C.

(To LADY ROSAMUND.) Dear, I've lost the address of that cook. Would you mind writing it out again? ¹

¹ *Sits on settee
L. C. with
Lady Jess.*

LADY R.

Certainly.

(*Goes to writing table* ² *and writes.*)

² *R. C.*

MRS. C.

(To LADY JESSICA.) What's the matter with our dear friend George Nepean? ³

³ *All become in-
terested.*

LADY J.

Matter?

MRS. C.

I ran against him in a post-office on my way from Paddington just now.

LADY J.

Yes?

MRS. C.

Your husband is quite well, I hope?

LADY J.

My husband? Oh, quite! He always is quite well. Why?

MRS. C.

George Nepean seemed so strange.

LADY J.

How?

¹ *Smoothing her gloves.*

² *Looks at Lady Jess.*

^{*} *4th call. Dolly.*

³ *Lady R. nods to Lady Jess; turns and smiles at Freddie at table R. C. Freddie turns up C.*

⁴ *Coming down C.*

⁵ *Comes down R. C.*

⁶ *They all look at each other nervously.*

MRS. C.¹

He said he was going to Paddington to meet your husband—and he made so much of it.²

LADY J.*

Ah! You see, my husband is a big man, so naturally George would make much of it.

MRS. C.

I always used to go to the station to meet my husband—when I had one.

LADY J.

(*A little triumphantly.*) Ah, Rosy and I know better than to kill our husbands with too much kindness.³

MRS. C.

Still, I think husbands need a little pampering—

SIR C.⁴

Not at all. The brutes are so easily spoilt. A little overdose of sweetness, a little extra attention from a wife to her husband, and life is never the same again!

FREDDIE.

(*Who has been waiting eagerly to get a word in.*)⁵ I suppose you didn't mention anything to George Nepean about our dining with you last evening?⁶

MRS. C.

(*Alert.*) Did I? Let me see! Yes! Yes! I did mention that you were over. Why?

(*They all look at each other.*)

FREDDIE.

Oh, nothing, nothing!

MRS. C.

I'm so sorry. Does it matter much?

LADY J.

Not in the least.¹

LADY R.

Oh, not in the least.

FREDDIE.

Not in the least.

SIR C.

Not at all.

MRS. C.

I'm afraid I made a mistake.

LADY R.

How?

MRS. C.²

Your husband——

LADY R.

Oh, my dear, what does it matter what my Freddie says or does or thinks, eh, Freddie? (*Frowning angrily aside at FREDDIE.*)³ There's the address of the cook.

(*Giving the paper on which she has been writing.*)

MRS. C.

Thank you so much. Good morning, dearest.
(*Kiss.*)

LADY R.

Good morning, dearest.⁴ (*Kiss.*)

MRS. C.

(*Going to LADY JESSICA.*) Good-bye, dearest.⁵
(*Kiss.*)

¹ *They all answer with a smile, and become serious at once.*

² *Mrs. Crespin and Lady R. rise. Lady R. crosses to Mrs. Crespin. Freddie drops down to chair R. C.*

³ *Freddie sinks into chair R. C.*

⁴ *Crosses to fire L. rings.*

⁵ *Lady Jess. rises.*

LADY J.

Good-bye, dearest. (*Kiss.*)

MRS. C.

(*Very sweetly, shaking hands.* Good-bye, Sir Christopher.

SIR C.

Good-bye.

MRS. C.

You are quite sure that I didn't make a mistake in telling George Nepean that Lady Rosy and Mr. Tatton dined with me last evening?

SIR C.

It was the truth, wasn't it?

MRS. C.

Of course it was.

SIR C.

One never makes a mistake in speaking the truth.

MRS. C.

Really? That's a very sweeping assertion to make.

SIR C.

I base it on my constant experience—and practice.

MRS. C.

You find it always answers to tell the truth?

SIR C.

Invariably.

MRS. C.

I hope it will in this case. Good-bye! Good-bye!
Good-bye!

(Exit MRS. CRESPIN.¹ They all stand looking at each other, nonplussed. SIR CHRISTOPHER slightly touching his head with perplexed gesture.)

SIR C.

Our fib won't do.

LADY R.

Freddie, you incomparable nincompoop!

FREDDIE.

I like that! If I hadn't asked her, what would have happened? George Nepean would have come in, you'd have plumped down on him with your lie, and what then? Don't you think it's jolly lucky I said what I did?²

SIR C.

It's lucky in this instance. But if I am to embark any further in these imaginative enterprises, I must ask you, Freddie, to keep a silent tongue.

FREDDIE.

What for?

SIR C.

Well, old fellow, it may be an unpalatable truth to you, but you'll never make a good liar.³

FREDDIE.

Very likely not. But if this sort of thing is going on in my house, I think I ought to.

LADY R.⁴

Oh, do subside, Freddie, do subside!

LADY J.*

Yes, George—and perhaps Gilbert—will be here directly. Oh, will somebody tell me what to do?

¹ Sir C. opens door L. for Mrs. Crespin; after her exit, closes door. They all turn and look at Sir C. He sinks into a chair up C., and shakes his head at them.

² Lady Jess. sits L. C. Sir Chris. puts hat on bookcase C., and comes down C.

³ Lady R. and Lady Jess. agree with Sir C.

⁴ Crosses to him C. Freddie sits R. C. annoyed.

* 5th call. George.

SIR C.

We have tried possibility number one. It has signally failed. Why not possibility number two ?

LADY J.

¹ *Rises.*

Tell the truth? My husband would never believe it! Besides, he threatened that he wouldn't spare me. And he won't.¹ No! No! No! Somebody dined with me last night, or was going to dine with me, and that somebody was a woman.

(*Enter Footman.*)²

² *L. Sir C.
crosses down R.*

FOOTMAN.

(*Announcing.*) Mrs. Coke!

(*Enter DOLLY.*)

DOLLY.

(*Going to LADY R.*) Ah, my dear Lady Rosamund——

(*Exit Footman.*)

LADY J.

(*Goes affectionately and a little hysterically to her.*) Dolly! How good of you! (*Kissing her.*)³

³ *Takes her away
from Lady R.*

DOLLY.

What's the matter?

LADY J.

Dolly, you dined with me, or were going to dine with me at the Star and Garter at Shepperford last evening. Don't say you can't, and didn't, for you must and did!

DOLLY.

Of course I'll say anything that's—necessary.

LADY J.

Oh, you treasure!

DOLLY.

But I don't understand——

(LADY JESSICA *takes her aside and whispers eagerly.*)¹

SIR C.

(*Glancing at LADY JESSICA and DOLLY.*) Possibility number one—with variations. I'm not required any further.²

LADY R.

Oh, Sir Christopher, you won't desert us?

SIR C.

Certainly not, if I can be of any use. But if this is to be a going concern, don't you think the fewer partners the better?

LADY R.

Oh, don't go. You can help us so much.

SIR C.

How?

LADY R.

Your mere presence will be an immense moral support to us.

SIR C.

(*Uncomfortable.*) Thank you! Thank you!

LADY R.

You can come to our assistance whenever we are in the lurch, corroborate us whenever we need corroboration—and——

¹ *They sit on settee.*

² *Going quickly up L. C., gets hat from book-case.*

SIR C.

Bolster up generally.

LADY R.

Yes. Besides, everybody knows you are such an honourable man. I feel they won't suspect you.

SIR C.

¹ Puts hat on
bookcase up C.

(Uncomfortable.) Thank you! Thank you!¹

DOLLY.

(To LADY JESSICA.) Very well, dear. I quite understand. After George went away, you were so upset at his suspicions that you came back to town without any dinner. Did I stay and have the dinner?

² Coming down
to back of set-
tee.

SIR C.²

No, no. I wouldn't go so far as that.

DOLLY.

But what did I do? I must have dined somewhere, didn't I? Not that I mind if I didn't dine anywhere. But won't it seem funny if I didn't dine somewhere?

LADY J.

I suppose it will.

DOLLY.

Very well then, where did I dine? Do tell me. I know I shall get into an awful muddle if I don't know. Where did I dine?

L

(Enter Footman.)³

FOOTMAN.

(Announcing.) Mr. George Nepean.

(Enter GEORGE NEPEAN.)

(Exit Footman.)

GEORGE.

(*Enters very frigidly, bows very coldly. Very stiffly.*) Good morning, Lady Rosamund! (*To the others—bowing.*) Good morning.

LADY R.¹

¹ R. C.

(*Very cordially.*) My dear George, don't take that tragic tone. (*Insists on shaking hands.*) Anyone would suppose there was something dreadful the matter. I've just explained to Sir Christopher your mistake of last night.

GEORGE.

My mistake?

LADY J.

You shouldn't have left so hurriedly, George. I sent Mr. Falkner after you to explain. Dolly, tell him.

DOLLY.

Jess and I had arranged to have a little dinner all by our two selves——

GEORGE.

Indeed!

DOLLY.

There's nothing strange in that, Sir Christopher?

SIR C.

Not at all. I am sure any person of either sex would only be too delighted to dine *tête-à-tête* with you.

DOLLY.

And when I got there, I found poor Jess in an awful state. She said you had come into the room and had made the most horrid accusations against her, poor thing!

GEORGE.

I made no accusation.

LADY J.

What did you mean by saying that Gilbert must know?

GEORGE.

Merely that I should tell him what I saw.

LADY J.

And you have told him?

GEORGE.

Yes, on his arrival an hour ago.

LADY J.

Where is he?

GEORGE.

Round at Sloane Street waiting till I have heard Lady Rosamund's explanation.

LADY R.

Well, you have heard it. Or, rather, it's Dolly's explanation. The whole thing is so ridiculously simple. I think you ought to beg Jess's pardon.

GEORGE.

I will when I am sure that I have wronged her.

FREDDIE.¹

Oh, come, I say, George! you don't refuse to take a lady's word——

LADY R.

Freddie, subside!²

DOLLY.

(To GEORGE.) Poor Jess was so much upset by what you said that she couldn't eat any dinner, she

¹ *Rises.*

² *Freddie sits very angry.*

nearly had hysterics, and when she got a little better, she came straight up to town, poor thing! *

* 6th Call. *Coke.*

GEORGE.

What was Mr. Falkner doing there?

LADY J.

He was staying in the hotel and happened to come into the room at that moment.¹ (*A little pause.*)

¹ *Lady Jess. shakes Dolly's hand gently.*

LADY R.

Is there anything else you would like to ask?

GEORGE.

No.

LADY R.

And you're quite satisfied?

GEORGE.

The question is not whether I'm satisfied, but whether Gilbert will be. I'll go and fetch him. Will you excuse me? ²

² *Going up L.*

SIR C.

(*Stops him.*) Nepean, I'm sure you don't wish to embitter your brother and Lady Jessica's whole future life by sowing jealousy and suspicion between them. Come now, like a good fellow, you'll smooth things over as much as you can.

GEORGE.

I shall not influence my brother one way or the other. He must judge for himself.

(*Exit.*³ SIR CHRISTOPHER *shrugs his shoulders.*)

³ *L. Sir C. crosses to Lady R.*

DOLLY.

I got through very well, didn't I? (*To LADY JESSICA.*)

LADY J.

Yes, dear. Thank you so much. But George didn't seem to believe it, eh?

FREDDIE.

It's so jolly thin. A couple of women dining together! what should a couple of women want to dine together for? ¹ Oh, it's too thin, you know!

¹ *Rises, goes up C. Lady R. goes down R.*

LADY J.

² *Rises.*

And you don't think Gilbert will believe it? ² He must! he must! Oh, I begin to wish that we had tried——

SIR C.

Possibility number two. I'm afraid it's too late now.

LADY J.

Oh, what shall I do? Do you think Gilbert will believe Dolly?

³ *Down R.*

LADY R.³

He must if Dolly only sticks to it.

DOLLY.

Oh, I'll stick to it. Only I should like to know where I dined. Where did I dine?

⁴ *L.*

(*Enter Footman* ⁴ *to DOLLY.*)

FOOTMAN.

If you please, ma'am, Mr. Coke is waiting for you below.

⁵ *Rises.*

DOLLY.⁵

(*With a scream.*) Oh, dear! Oh, dear! I'd quite forgotten!

LADY R.

What?

DOLLY.

I arranged to meet Archie here and take him on to the dentist's. (*To Footman.*) Tell Mr. Coke I'll come in a moment.

(*Exit Footman.*)

¹ L.

DOLLY.

(*To LADY JESSICA.*) Dear, I must go——

LADY J.

You can't! You must stay now and tell Gilbert —mustn't she, Sir Christopher?

SIR C.

I'm afraid you must, Mrs. Coke. You are our sheet-anchor.

DOLLY.

But what can I tell Archie?

LADY R.

Can't you put him off, send him away?

DOLLY.

What excuse can I make? He is so fidgety and inquisitive. He'll insist on knowing everything. No, I must go.

LADY J.

(*Desperate.*) You can't! You can't! You must stay! Couldn't we tell Archie and ask him to help us?

SIR C.

(*Impatiently to LADY R.*) Oh!

DOLLY.

Oh, I wouldn't tell Archie for the world. He wouldn't understand.

(*Enter, L., ARCHIBALD COKE, in very correct frock coat very prim and starchy.*)

¹ *Comes C.*

COKE.¹

Good-morning, Rosy! Freddie! Sir Christopher! (*Nodding all round.*) Now, Dolly, are you ready?

DOLLY.

I—I——

Lady J.

She can't go, Archie.

COKE.

Can't go?

LADY J.

She—she isn't well.

COKE.

Not well? (*Alarmed.*) Not influenza again?

DOLLY.

No, not influenza. But I'd rather not go.

COKE.

Oh, nonsense, nonsense! I cannot take the gas alone. (*To SIR CHRISTOPHER.*) I've a terrible dread of the gas. I'm sure they'll give me too much some day. Now, Dolly.

LADY R.

(*To SIR CHRISTOPHER.*) Gilbert will be here directly. Can't you get him away?

² *Goes to Coke.*

SIR C.²

³ *Coke looks at Dolly.*

⁴ *Taking Coke up C., Lady R. follows.*

Coke, your wife isn't just the thing,³ as you can see. I'll go to the dentist's with you. Come along!⁴ I'll see they give you the right dose.

COKE.¹

(*Resisting.*) No. My wife is the proper person to go to the dentist with me, and see that the gas is rightly administered. Come, Dolly!

LADY J.

(*Comes desperately to COKE.*) Dolly can't go!

COKE.

Why not?

LADY J.

She must stay here and tell Gilbert that she dined with me last evening.

COKE.

Tell Gilbert that she dined with you last evening! What for?

SIR C.

(*Aside to LADY ROSAMUND.*) We're taking too many partners into this concern.

COKE.

She dined with me. Why should she tell Gilbert she dined with you?

LADY J.

If you must know, I was coming to the station from Barbara's,² and I must have taken the wrong turning——

COKE.

(*Very suspicious.*) The wrong turning——

LADY J.

Yes, for instead of finding myself at the station, I found myself at the Star and Garter.

COKE.

The Star and Garter!

¹ *Coming down again.*

² *Sir Chris. turns up C., with a groan; sits on armchair.*

LADY J.

And as I was frightfully hungry I asked Mr. Falkner to give me a little dinner.

COKE.

A little dinner.

LADY J.

George Nepean happened to come in, and seeing the dinner things laid, actually suspected me of dining with Mr. Falkner! And he has told Gilbert, and don't you see—if Dolly will only say that it was she who was dining with me—don't you see?

COKE.*

No, I don't. I cannot lend myself to anything of the sort. And I expressly forbid Dolly to say that she dined with you.¹

LADY J.

But she has said so. She has just told George Nepean.

COKE.

Told George Nepean!²

DOLLY.

I couldn't leave poor Jess in a scrape. And now I have said so, I must stick to it, mustn't I? You wouldn't have me tell another one now.

COKE.

Well, I'm surprised! Really, I consider it quite disgraceful.

FREDDIE.³

Look here, Coke, we can't let Gilbert think that Jess was dining with Falkner, can we? He'd only make a howling scandal, and drag us all into it.

* 7th Call. Gilbert. Footman George.

¹ Freddie comes comes down R.

² Lady R. by back of chair R. C.

³ Freddie crosses to Coke, taking his arm. Coke withdraws arm.

We've got to say something. I know it's jolly thin, but can you think of a better one? ¹

¹ *All look enquiringly at Coke.*

COKE.

No,² and I decline to have anything to do with this! I should have thought my character was too well known for me to be asked to a—a— It is too disgraceful!³ I will not lend my countenance to anything of the kind!

² *All disappointed.*

³ *Freddie goes up C.*

LADY R.⁴

⁴ *Crosses to Coke R. C.*

Very well then, will you please take yourself off and leave us to manage the affair ourselves?

COKE.

No, I will not forfeit my self-respect, I will not permit my wife to forfeit her self-respect by taking part in these proceedings. Really, it is—it is—it is too disgraceful.

(LADY JESSICA suddenly bursts into tears,⁵ sobs violently.)

⁵ *Lady R. goes up to Sir C., and asks him to try and get Coke to help them. Lady Jess. sits L., Dolly sits by her.*

SIR C.

(Comes up to him, very calm, touches him on the shoulder.) Coke, I assure you that theoretically I have as great an objection to lying as you or any man living. But Lady Jessica has acted a little foolishly. No more. Of that I am sure. If you consent to hold your tongue, I think Gilbert Nepean will accept your wife's explanation and the affair will blow over. If, however, you insist on the truth coming out, what will happen? You will very likely bring about a rupture between them, you may possibly place Lady Jessica in a position where she will have no alternative but to take a fatal plunge, and you will drag yourself and your wife into a very unpleasant family scandal. That's the situation.

COKE.

But it places me in a very awkward position. No, really, I cannot consent—¹ I'm an honourable man.

SIR C.

So are we all, all honourable men. The curious thing is that ever since the days of the Garden of Eden, women have had a knack of impaling us honourable men on dilemmas of this kind, where the only alternative is to be false to the truth or false to them.² In this instance I think we may very well keep our mouths shut without suffering any violent pangs of conscience about the matter. Come now!

COKE.

(*Overwhelmed.*) Well, understand ³ me, if I consent to keep my mouth shut, I must not be supposed to countenance what is going on. That is quite understood?

SIR C.

Oh, quite! Quite! We'll consider you as strictly neutral.⁴

COKE.

(*Rising up, violently.*) No!⁵ On second thoughts, I really cannot. I cannot!

LADY R.

Very well! Then will you go away and leave us to manage it as we can?

COKE.

And I had arranged to take the gas so comfortably this morning.⁶ It's most unfair to place me in a position of this kind.⁷ I must protest—I really——

(*Enter Footman.*)⁸

¹ *Coke crosses down R.*

² *Coke sits R. C.*

³ *Lady R. comes down to Lady Jess L. C. Freddie back of table R. C.*

⁴ *Sir C. turns to the ladies, nodding his head—all nod.*

⁵ *All disappointed. Sir C. turns up C. crosses at back, down R.*

⁶ *Lady R. turns up C.*

⁷ *Coke rises.*

⁸ *L.*

(FOOTMAN.)

(*Announcing.*) Mr. Gilbert Nepean. Mr. George Nepean.

COKE.

¹ *Sits again.*Oh! ¹(*Enter GILBERT and GEORGE NEPEAN.*)(*Exit Footman.*)

LADY R.

(*Advances very cordially to GILBERT, who does not respond.*) Good morning, Gilbert.

GILBERT.

Good morning. Good morning, Coke.

COKE.

(*Very uncomfortable.*) Good morning.

GILBERT.

(*Nodding.*) Freddie! Deering! (*Looks at LADY JESSICA, who looks at him. They do not speak. Pause, looking round.*) I thought I was coming here for a private explanation.²

LADY R.

No, Sir Christopher. If Gilbert is determined to carry this any further we shall need the unbiassed testimony of an impartial friend, so that everybody may know exactly what did occur. Please stay.³

SIR C.

(*Puts down hat.*) Whew! (*To himself.*)

LADY R.

Gilbert, don't be foolish. Everybody here knows all about the stupid affair of last evening.

GILBERT.

Everybody here knows? Well, I don't. I shall be glad to be informed. (*Looks round.*)

² *Sir C. buttons up coat, turns up R., crosses back to C. for his hat. Freddie draws Lady R.'s attention that he is leaving. As Sir C. gets to door Lady R. catches him by his coat tails, and brings him back R. C.*
³ *Takes hat away, gives it to Freddie, who puts it on table R. C.*

(COKE shows symptoms of great discomfort.)

SIR C.

Nepean, I'm sure you don't wish to make any more than is necessary of Lady Jessica's trifling indiscretion——

GILBERT.

I wish to make no more of it than the truth, and I'll take care that nobody makes less of it. Now —(To LADY JESSICA, *very furiously*)—you were dining with this fellow, Falkner, last evening?

LADY J.

No.

GILBERT.

No? Then whom did you dine with?

LADY J.

If you speak like that I shan't answer you.

GILBERT.

Will you tell me what I ask?

LADY J.

No!

GILBERT.

No, you won't? Perhaps, as you all know, somebody else will oblige me. Coke——¹

COKE.

(*Most uncomfortable.*) Really, I—I don't know all the particulars, and I would prefer not to be mixed up in your private affairs.

GILBERT.

Deering—you?

SIR C.

My dear fellow, I only know what I've heard, and

¹ Coke starts, drops stick, picks it up again.

hearsay evidence is proverbially untrustworthy. Now, if I may offer you a little advice, if I were you I should gently take Lady Jessica by the hand, I should gently lead her home, I should gently use all those endearing little arts of persuasion and entreaty which a husband may legitimately use to his wife, and I should gently beguile her into telling me the whole truth. I should believe everything she told me, I shouldn't listen to what anybody else said, and I should never mention the matter again. Now, do as I tell you, and you'll be a happy man to-morrow, and for the rest of your life. (*Pause.*)

GILBERT.

(*Looks at LADY JESSICA.*) No. (SIR CHRISTOPHER *shrugs his shoulders.*)¹ I came here for an explanation, and I won't go till I've got it.

¹ Sir C. crosses & bows down R.

LADY R.

My dear Gilbert, we're patiently waiting to give you an explanation, if you'll only listen to it. Dolly, do tell him how it all happened, and let him see what a donkey he is making of himself.

DOLLY.

Yes, Gilbert, I wish you wouldn't get in these awful tempers. You frighten us so that in a very little while we shan't know whether we're speaking the truth, or whether we're not.

GILBERT.

Go on!

DOLLY.

Jess and I had arranged to have a little *tête-à-tête* dinner at Shepperford and talk over old times, all by our two selves (COKE gets very uncomfortable)—hadn't we, Jess? Rosy, you heard us arranging it all?

LADY R.

Yes, on the last night you were at our place.¹

DOLLY.

Yes. Well, Jess got there first and then Mr. Falkner happened to come into the room, and then George happened to come in and wouldn't wait to listen to Jess's explanation, would he, Jess? Well, when I got there, I found Jess in strong hysterics, poor old dear! I couldn't get her round for ever so long. And as soon as she was better she came straight up to town. And that's all. (*Pause.*) *

GILBERT.

And what did you do?

DOLLY.

(*Very nervous.*) I came up to town too.

GILBERT.

Without any dinner?

DOLLY.

No—I——

GILBERT.

Where did you dine?

DOLLY.

I didn't really dine anywhere—not to say dine. I had some cold chicken and a little tongue when I got home. (*Pause.*) And a tomato salad.

COKE.

(*Very much shocked at DOLLY.*) Oh, of all the——

(SIR CHRISTOPHER nudges him to be quiet.)

¹ Gilbert looks at Lady R. She is confused.

* 8th Call. Falkner. Footman.

GILBERT.

Coke, what do you know of this? ¹

¹ *Coke appeals to Sir C., who turns away.*

COKE.

Well—I know what Dolly has just told you.

GILBERT.

You allow your wife to dine out alone?

COKE.

Yes—yes—on certain occasions.

GILBERT.

And you knew of this arrangement?

COKE.

Yes,—at least, no—not before she told me of it.²
But after she told me, I did know.

² *Puffs his cheeks.*

GEORGE.

But Jessica said that she expected a small party.

DOLLY.

I was the small party.

GILBERT.

(*To COKE.*) What time did Dolly get home last evening?

COKE.

Eh? Well, about——

DOLLY.

A little before nine.³

GEORGE.

³ *Coke agrees with Dolly. George comes C.*

Impossible! I was at Shepperford after half past seven. If Lady Jessica had hysterics, and you stayed with her, you could scarcely have reached Kensington before nine.

DOLLY.

Well, perhaps it was ten. Yes, it was ten.

GILBERT.

Coke, were you at home last evening when your wife got back?

COKE.

I? No—yes, yes—no—not precisely.

GILBERT.

(*Growing indignant.*) Surely you must know whether you were at home or not when your wife returned? ¹

¹ *Lady R. comes down R. by Sir C. Coke rises.*

COKE.

No, I don't. And I very much object to be cross-questioned in this manner. I've told you all I know, and—I—I withdraw from the whole business. Now, Dolly, are you ready?

GILBERT.

No, stop! I want to get at the bottom of this and I will. (*Coming furiously to LADY JESSICA.*) Once more, will you give me your version of this cock-and-bull story?

² *L.*

(*Enter Footman.*)²

FOOTMAN.

(*Announcing.*) Mr. Falkner!

GILBERT.

³ *Moves down R.*

Ah! ³

SIR C.

Nepean! Nepean! Control yourself!

(*Enter FALKNER.*)

(*Exit Footman.*)

GILBERT.

Let me be, Deering. (*Going to FALKNER.*) You were at Shepperford last evening. My wife was there with you?

FALKNER.*

I was at Shepperford last evening. Lady Jessica was there. She was dining with Lady Rosamund——

* *Curtain warning.*

LADY R.

No! No!¹

GILBERT.

Lady Jessica was dining with Lady Rosamund?

FALKNER.

I understood her to say so, did I not, Lady Rosamund?

¹ *Sir C. turns to Lady R., gesticulating, turns, sees Gilbert watching him—picks up vase of flowers from table R. C., smells them, offers them to Lady R., who smells ad. lib.*

LADY R.

No! No! It was Mrs Coke who was dining with Lady Jessica.

FALKNER.

Then I misunderstood you. Does it matter?

GILBERT.

Yes.² I want to know what the devil you were doing there?

² *Going to him.*

SIR C.

Nepean! Nepean!

GILBERT.

Do you hear? What the devil were you doing there? Will you tell me, or——³

³ *Throws down gloves.*

(*Trying to get at FALKNER, SIR CHRISTOPHER holds him back.*)

LADY J.

(*Rises very quietly.*) Mr. Falkner, tell my husband the truth.

FALKNER.

But, Lady Jessica—

LADY J.

Yes, if you please—the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. Tell him all. I wish it.

GILBERT.

You hear what she says. Now then, the truth—and be damned to you!

FALKNER.

(*Looks around, then after a pause, with great triumph.*) I love Lady Jessica with all my heart and soul!¹ I asked her to come to me at Shepperford last evening. She came. Your brother saw us and left us. The next moment Lady Rosamund came, and she had scarcely gone when the maid came with your telegram and took Lady Jessica back to town. If you think there was anything more on your wife's side than a passing folly and amusement at my expense, you will wrong her. If you think there is anything less on my side than the deepest, deepest, deepest love and worship, you will wrong me. Understand this. She is guiltless. Be sure of that. And now you've got the truth, and be damned to you. (*Goes to door at back—turns.*) If you want me, you know where to find me. (*To LADY JESSICA.*) Lady Jessica, I am at your service—always!
(*Exit at back. They all look at each other.*)

SIR C.

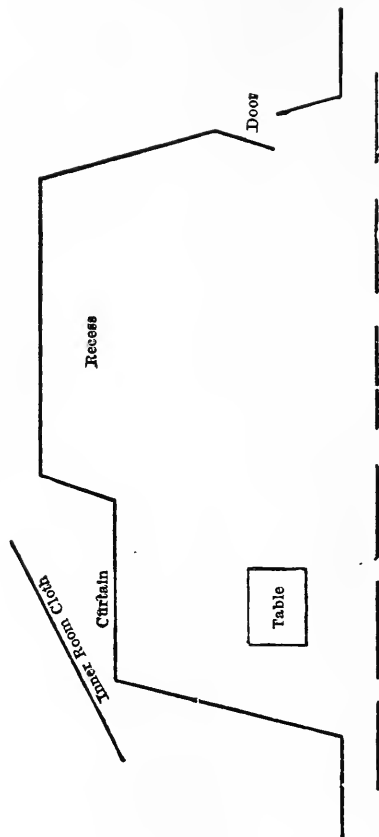
(*Very softly to himself.*) Possibility Number Two—with a vengeance!

CURTAIN.

(*Time—38 minutes.*)

¹ Gilbert makes a movement to get at Falkner. Sir C. restrains him.

THE LIARS
ACT IV



ACT IV.

SCENE: *Drawing-room in SIR CHRISTOPHER'S flat in Victoria Street. L. at back a large recess, taking up half the stage. The right half is taken up by an inner room furnished as library and smoking-room. Curtains dividing library from drawing-room. Door up stage, L. A table down stage, R. The room is in great confusion, with portmanteau open, clothes, etc., scattered over the floor; articles which an officer going to Central Africa might want are lying about.*

(*TIME: night, about half-past nine o'clock.*)

(*SIR CHRISTOPHER and TAPLIN are busy packing. Ring at door.*)

SIR C.¹

See who it is, Taplin; and come back and finish packing the moment I am disengaged.

(*Exit TAPLIN. He re-enters in a few moments, showing in BEATRICE in evening dress. SIR CHRISTOPHER goes to her, and shakes hands cordially.*)

(*Exit TAPLIN.*)

BEA.

I was out dining when you called. But I got your message and I came on at once.

*1st Call Sir Christopher.
Taplin.
Beatrice.*

1 Sir Christopher at back of table R. C. putting documents into deed box on table. Taplin folding tunic up C.—puts it in uniform case. Bell rings off L.

SIR C.

I couldn't wait. I had to come back and pack.
(*Going on with his packing.*) I haven't one half-moment to spare.

BEA.

When do you start?

SIR C.

¹ *Folding up
stool by table*
R. C.

To-morrow morning.¹ It's very urgent. I've been at the War Office all the afternoon. You'll excuse my going on with this. I've three most important duties to fulfil to-night.

BEA.

What are they?

SIR C.

(*Packing.*) I've got to pack. I've got to persuade Ned to come out there with me—if I can. And I've got (*looking straight at her*) to make you promise to be my wife when I come home again.

BEA.

Oh, Kit, you know what I've told you so often!

SIR C.

(*Packing always.*) Yes, and you're telling it me again, and wasting my time when every moment is gold. Ah, dear, forgive me, you know I think you're worth the wooing. And you know I'm the man to woo you. And you know I'm ready to spend three, five, seven, fourteen or twenty-one years in winning you. But if you'd only say "Yes" this minute, and let me pack and see Ned, you'd save me such a lot of trouble. And I'll do all the love-making when I come back.

BEA.

Where is Ned?²

² *Sits on trunk*
L. C.

SIR C.

Playing the fool for Lady Jessica.¹ There never was but one woman in this world that was worth playing the fool for, and I'm playing the fool for her. I've sent for Ned to come here. That's a digression. Come back to brass-tacks. You'll be my wife when I come home?

¹ Picks up lantern from sofa L. comes back to C., folds lantern up, places it in case, puts it in deed box on table R. C.

BEA.

Let me think it over, Kit.

SIR C.

No. You've had plenty of time for that. I can't allow you to think it over any longer.

BEA.

But it means so much to me. Let me write to you out there?

SIR C.

(*Very determinedly.*) No. (*Leaves his packing, takes out his watch.*) It's a little too bad of you when I'm so pressed.² Now, I can only give you five minutes, and it must absolutely be fixed up in that time. (*With great tenderness and passion.*) Come, my dear, dear chum, what makes you hesitate to give yourself to me? You want me to come well out of this, don't you? *

² Comes L. to her.

* 2nd Call.
Gilbert.
Falkner.

BEA.

You know I do!

SIR C.

Then you don't love your country if you won't have me. Once give me your promise, and it will give me the pluck of fifty men! Don't you know if I'm sure of you I shall carry everything before me?

¹ *Rises.*

BEA.¹

Will you? Will you? But if you were to die——

SIR C.

I won't die if you're waiting to be my wife when I come home. And you will? You will? I won't hear anything but "Yes."² You shan't move one inch till you've said "Yes." Now! say it! Say "Yes!" Say "Yes"—do you hear?

² *Taking her hands.*

BEA.

(*Throwing herself into his arms.*) Yes! Yes! Yes! Take me! Take me!

SIR C.

(*Kissing her very reverently.*) My wife when I come home again.

(*A pause.*)

BEA.

You know, Kit, I can love very deeply.

SIR C.

And so you shall, when I come home again. And so will I when I come home again. (*Looking at his watch.*) A minute and a quarter! I must get on with my packing.³

³ *Crosses down, picks up bucket by trunk, throws it up C. Beatrice crosses to table R. C.*

BEA.

Kit, there will be some nursing and other woman's work out there?

SIR C.

Yes, I suppose——⁴

⁴ *Taking sword from sofa; takes it from scabbard and puts it in a leather one.*

BEA.

I'll come with you.

SIR C.

Very well. How long will it take you to pack?

BEA.

Half an hour.¹

¹ *Crosses to sofa ;
puts on cloak.*

SIR C.

All right! I must wait here for Ned. Come back and have some supper by-and-by.

BEA.

Yes—in half an hour.

SIR C.

We might be married at Cairo—on our way out?

BEA.

Just as you please.

SIR C.

Or before we start to-morrow morning?

BEA.

Will there be time?

SIR C.

Oh, I'll make time.²

(*Enter TAPLIN.*)

TAPLIN.

Mr. Gilbert Nepean is below, Sir Christopher.

SIR C.

(*Glancing at his packing.*) Show him up, Taplin.

(*Exit TAPLIN.*)

SIR C.

(*Holding BEATRICE'S hand.*) To-morrow morning, then?

² *He is about to
embrace her, as
Taplin enters.
L. Sir C. pre-
tends to look
for something.*

BEA.

Yes, I've given you some trouble to win me, Kit?

SIR C.

No more than you're worth.

BEA.

I'll give you none now you have won me.¹

(Enter TAPLIN.)

TAPLIN.

(Announcing.) Mr. Gilbert Nepean.

(Enter GILBERT NEPEAN.)

(Exit TAPLIN.)

BEA.

How d'ye do?

GILBERT.

How d'ye do?

(Shaking hands.)²

BEA.

And good-bye. (To SIR CHRISTOPHER.) No, I won't have you come down all those stairs, indeed I won't Au revoir.³

(Exit.)

GILBERT.

Excuse my coming at this hour.

SIR C.⁴

I'm rather pressed. What can I do for you?

GILBERT.

I have been down to Shepperford this afternoon. It seems you dined there last evening.

¹ Kisses her—
they separate
as Taplin
re-enters L.

² Gilbert crosses
down R.

³ Sir C. shuts
door L.

⁴ Sir C. takes hel-
met out of case
on sofa, un-
screws spike,
and puts it in
case.

SIR C.

I did.

GILBERT.

I want to get all the evidence.

SIR C.

What for?

GILBERT.

To guide me in my future action.¹ Deering, I trust you. Can I take that fellow's word that my wife is guiltless?

¹ *Sir C. lets the lid of helmet case drop—and looks at Gilbert.*

SIR C.

I'm sure you can.

GILBERT.

How do you know?

SIR C.

Because he'd give his head to tell you that she is not.

GILBERT.

Why?

SIR C.

It would give him the chance he is waiting for—to take her off your hands.

GILBERT.

Take her off my hands—he's waiting for that?

SIR C.²

² *Going to him.*

Don't you see he is? And don't you see that you're doing your best to make him successful?

GILBERT.

How?

SIR C.

Don't think when you've married a woman that

you can sit down and neglect her. You can't. You've married one of the most charming women in London, and when a man has married a charming woman, if he doesn't continue to make love to her some other man will. Such are the sad ways of humankind! How have you treated Lady Jessica?

GILBERT.

But do you suppose I will allow my wife to go out dining with other men?

SIR C.

The best way to avoid that is to take her out to dinner yourself—and to give her a good one. Have you dined to-night?¹

¹ *Kneeling by trunk, packs khaki clothes.*

GILBERT.

Dined? No! I can't dine till I know what to believe.

SIR C.

The question is, what do you want to believe? If you want to believe her innocent, take the facts as they stand. If you want to believe her guilty, continue to treat her as you are doing, and you'll very soon have plenty of proof. And let me tell you, nobody will pity you. Do you want to believe her innocent?

GILBERT.

Of course I do.

SIR C.

Where is she?

GILBERT.

I don't know—at home, I suppose.

² *Going to him.*

SIR C.²

Go home to her—don't say one word about what

has happened, and invite her out to the very best dinner that London can provide.

GILBERT.

But after she has acted as she has done?

SIR C.

My dear fellow, she's only a woman. I never met but one woman that was worth taking seriously. What are they? A kind of children, you know. Humour them, play with them, buy them the toys they cry for, but don't get angry with them. They're not worth it, except one! Now I must get on with my packing.

(SIR CHRISTOPHER *sets to work packing*. GILBERT *walks up and down the room, biting his nails, deliberating*. GILBERT, *after a moment or two, speaks*.)

GILBERT.

Perhaps you're right, Deering.

SIR C.

Oh, I know I am!¹

GILBERT.

I'll go to her.

SIR C.

(*Busy packing.*) Make haste, or you may be too late.

(GILBERT *goes to door*.² *At that moment enter* ² L.

TAPLIN.)

TAPLIN.

(*Announcing.*) Mr. Falkner!

(*Enter FALKNER.*)³

(*Exit* TAPLIN. GILBERT and FALKNER *stand for a*

¹ Picks up helmet case from sofa L., crosses to R. with it.

³ Sir C. lets helmet case drop behind table R., stands watching the two men.

¹ Falkner crosses to sofa, puts hat down, crosses and shuts door L.

moment looking at each other. *Exit* GILBERT;
FALKNER looks after him.¹

SIR C.

Well?

FALKNER.

(*Very elated.*) You want to see me?

SIR C.

Yes. You seem excited.

FALKNER.

I've had some good news.

SIR C.

What?

FALKNER.

The best. She loves me.

SIR C.

You've seen her?²

FALKNER.

No.

SIR C.

Written to her?

FALKNER.

Yes. I've just had this answer.

(*Taking out letter.*)

SIR C.

Where is she?

FALKNER.

Still at her sister's. (*Reading.*) "I shall never forget the words you spoke this morning. You were right in saying that your love would not be wasted. I have learned at last what it is worth.

² Takes sword belt hanging on chair R. C.

3d Call. Lady.
Jessica. Lady
Rosamund.

You said you would be at my service always. Do not write again. Wait till you hear from me, and the moment I send for you, come to me.”¹ I knew I should win her at last, and I shall!

SIR C.

Après?

FALKNER.

What does it matter? If I can persuade her I shall take her out to Africa with me.

SIR C.

Africa? Nonsense! There's only one woman in the world that's any use in that part of the globe, and I'm taking her out myself.

FALKNER.

Beatrice.

SIR C.

We are to be married to-morrow morning.

FALKNER.

I congratulate you—with all my heart.

(Shaking hands warmly.)

SIR C.

Thank you.² *(Pause.)* You'll come with us, Ned?

FALKNER.

If she will come too.

SIR C.

Oh, we can't have her.

FALKNER.

Why not?

SIR C.

In the first place, she'd be very much in the way.

¹ *Crosses down. R. comes back, meets Sir C. face to face. Sir C. has thrown belt away behind table R.*

² *Falkner about to go R. Sir C. detains him, keeping his hand.*

In the second place—it's best to be frank—Lady Deering will not recognize Lady Jessica.

FALKNER.

Very well. (*Turns on heel.*) Good-night, Kit!
(*Very curtly.*)

SIR C.

¹ *Sir C. places both hands on Falkner's shoulders.*

No.¹ Ned, you're still up that everlasting *cul-de-sac*—playing the lover to a married woman, and I've got to drag you out of it.

FALKNER.

It's no use, Kit. My mind is made up. Let me go.

SIR C.

To the devil with Lady Jessica? No, I'm going to stop you.

FALKNER.

Ah, you'll stop me! How?

SIR C.

² *Falkner moves away. Sir C. follows him.*

There was a time when one whisper would have done it. (*Whispers.*) Duty.² You know that you're the only man who can treat peaceably with the chiefs. You know that your going out may save hundreds, perhaps thousands of lives.

FALKNER.

I'm not sure of that.

SIR C.

You're not sure? Well then, try it—put it to the test. But you know there's every chance. You know the whole country is waiting for you to declare yourself. You know that you have a splendid chance of putting the crown on your life's work, and you know that if you don't seize it, it will be because you stay here skulking after her!

FALKNER.

Skulking!

SIR C.

What do you call it? What will everybody call it? Ned, you've faced the most horrible death day after day for months. You've done some of the bravest things out there that have been done by any Englishman in this generation; but if you turn tail now there's only one word will fit you to the end of your days, and that word is "Coward!"

FALKNER.

Coward!

SIR C.

Coward! And there's only one epitaph to be written on you by-and-by—"Sold his honour, his fame, his country, his duty, his conscience, his all, for a petticoat!"¹

FALKNER.

Very well, then, when I die write that over me. I tell you this, Kit, if I can only win her—and I shall, I shall, I feel it—she'll leave that man and come to me; and then!—I don't care one snap of the fingers if Africa is swept bare of humanity from Cairo to Cape Town, and from Teneriffe to Zanzibar! Now argue with me after that!²

SIR C.

Argue with you? Not I! But I wish there was some way of kidnapping fools into sense and reason and locking them up there for the rest of their lives.

(Enter TAPLIN.)

TAPLIN)

(Announcing.) Lady Jessica Nepean, Lady Rosamund Tatton.³

¹ Sir C. crosses to L. puts foot on trunk. Falkner crosses to C.

Sir C. crosses down R.

³ Enter L. Falkner meets Lady Jess C. Sir C. sits on arm of sofa L., annoyed at Lady J.'s entrance.

(Enter LADY JESSICA and LADY ROSAMUND.)

(Exit TAPLIN.)

(LADY JESSICA shows delighted surprise at seeing FALKNER, goes to him cordially. LADY ROSAMUND tries to stop LADY JESSICA from going to FALKNER.)

LADY J.

(To FALKNER.) I didn't expect to find you here.

FALKNER.

I am waiting for you.

LADY R.

(Interposing.) No, Jess, no. Sir Christopher!
(Aside to him.) Help me to get her away from him.¹

¹ Sir C. crosses
between them.

(LADY JESSICA and FALKNER are talking vigorously together.)

SIR C.

One moment. Perhaps we may as well get this little matter fixed up here and now. (Takes out watch, looking ruefully at his packing.) Lady Jessica, may I ask what has happened since I left you this morning?

LADY J.

Nothing. My husband went away in a rage. I've stayed with Rosy all day.

LADY R.

We've been talking it all over.

LADY J.

Oh, we've been talking it all over—(Gesture)—and over and over, till I'm thoroughly—seasick of it!

LADY R.

And so I persuaded her to come and talk it over with you.

SIR C.

(*Glancing at his packing, to LADY JESSICA.*)
You can't arrive at a decision?

LADY J.

Oh, yes, I can; only Rosy won't let me act on it.

LADY R.

I should think not.

SIR C.

What is your decision?

LADY J.

I don't mind for myself. I feel that everything is in a glorious muddle, and I don't care how I get out of it, or whether I get out of it at all.¹

¹ *Crosses down R.*

SIR C.

But on the whole the best way of getting out of it is to run away with Mr. Falkner?

LADY J.

Mr. Falkner has behaved splendidly to me.

SIR C.

He has! He's a brick! And I'm quite sure that in proposing to ruin your reputation, and make you miserable for life, he is actuated by the very best intentions.

LADY J.

I don't care whether I'm happy or miserable for the rest of my life.

SIR C.

You don't care now, but you will to-morrow and next week, and next year, and all the years after.

LADY J.

No, I shan't! I won't!

FALKNER.

I'll take care, Lady Jessica, that you never regret this step. You mind is quite made up?

LADY J.

Yes, quite.

FALKNER.

Then no more be said.¹

² *Takes her hand.*

(*Offering arm. Gesture of despair from* LADY ROSAMUND. *SIR CHRISTOPHER soothes her.*)

SIR C.

One moment, Ned! (*Takes out his watch, looks ruefully at his packing, half aside.*) Good Lord! when shall I get on with my packing? (*Puts watch in pocket, faces FALKNER and LADY JESSICA very resolutely.*) Now! I've nothing to say in the abstract against running away with another man's wife! There may be planets where it is not only the highest ideal morality, but where it has the further advantage of being a practical way of carrying on society.² But it has this one fatal defect in our country—it won't work!³ You know what we English are, Ned. We're not a bit better than our neighbours, but, thank God! we do pretend we are, and we do make it hot for anybody who disturbs that holy pretence. And take my word for it, my dear Lady Jessica, my dear Ned, it won't work.⁴ You know it's not an original experiment you're making. It has been tried before. Have you ever

² *Falkner looks at Jessica.*

³ *Falkner drops her hand.*

⁴ *Lady R. sits up L. C.*

known it to be successful? Lady Jessica, think of the brave pioneers who have gone before you in this enterprise. They've all perished, and their bones whiten the anti-matrimonial shore.¹ Think of them! Charley Gray and Lady Rideout—flitting shabbily about the Continent at cheap *table d'hôtes* and gambling clubs, rubbing shoulders with all the blackguards and demi-mondaines of Europe. Poor old Fitz and his beauty—moping down at Farnhurst, cut by the county, with no single occupation except to nag and rag each other to pieces from morning to night. Billy Dover and Polly Atchison—

¹ *Falkner takes her hand and places it on his arm.*

LADY J.

(*Indignant.*) Well!

—cut in for fresh partners in three weeks. That old idiot, Sir Bonham Dancer—paid five thousand pounds damages for being saddled with the professional strong man's wife. George Nuneham and Mrs. Sandys—George is conducting a tramcar in New York, and Mrs. Sandys—Lady Jessica, you knew Mrs. Sandys, a delicate, sweet little creature, I've met her at your house—she drank herself to death, and died in a hospital.² Not encouraging, is it? Marriage may be disagreeable, it may be unprofitable, it may be ridiculous; but it isn't as bad as that! And do you think the experiment is going to be successful in *your case*? Not a bit of it!³ No. Ned, hear me out. (*Turns to* LADY JESSICA.) First of all there will be the shabby scandal and dirty business of the divorce court. You won't like that. It isn't nice! You won't like it. After the divorce court, what is Ned to do with you? Take you to Africa? I do implore you, if you hope for any happiness in that state to which it is pleasing Falkner and Providence to call you, I do implore

² *Lady Jess moves away a little. Falkner pursues her.*

³ *Falkner turns up C. Sir C. crosses to Lady Jess. Falkner comes down C*

you, don't go out to Africa with him. You'd never stand the climate and the hardships, and you'd bore each other to death in a week. But if you don't go out to Africa, what are you to do? Stay in England, in society? Everybody will cut you. Take a place in the country? Think of poor old Fitz down at Farnhurst! Go abroad? Think of Charley Gray and Lady Rideout. Take any of the other dozen alternatives and find yourself stranded in some shady hole or corner, with the one solitary hope and ambition of somehow wriggling back into respectability. That's your side of it, Lady Jessica. As for Ned here, what is to become of him? (*Angry gesture from FALKNER.*) Yes, Ned, I know you don't want to hear, but I'm going to finish. Turn away your head.¹ This is for Lady Jessica. He's at the height of his career, with a great and honourable task in front of him. If you turn him aside you'll not only wreck and ruin your own life and reputation, but you'll wreck and ruin his. You won't! You won't! His interests, his duty, his honour all lie out there. If you care for him, don't keep him shuffling and malingering here. Send him out with me to finish his work like the good, splendid fellow he is. Set him free, Lady Jessica, and go back to your home. Your husband has been here. He's sorry for what is past, and he has promised to treat you more kindly in the future. He's waiting at home to take you out. You missed a very good dinner last night. Don't miss another to-night. I never saw a man in a better temper than your husband. Go to him, and do, once for all, have done with this other folly.² Do believe me, my dear Ned, my dear Lady Jessica, before it is too late, do believe me, it won't work, it won't work, it won't work!³ (*A little pause.*)

¹ *Falkner crosses down L.*

² *Falkner takes a step towards C.*

³ *Sir C. goes to Lady R.*

LADY J.

I think you're the most horrid man I ever met!

SIR C.

Because I've told you the truth.

LADY J.

Yes, that's the worst of it! It is the truth.

LADY R.

It's exactly what I've been telling her all the afternoon.

*With Call Gilbert.
Taplin.*

FALKNER.¹

¹ *Crosses to her.*

Lady Jessica, I want to speak to you alone.

LADY J.

What's the use? We've got to part.

FALKNER.

No! No!

LADY J.

Yes, my friend. I won't ruin your career. We've got to part: and the fewer words the better.

FALKNER.²

² *Takes her hand.*

I can't give you up.

LADY J.

You must! Perhaps it's best. You can always cherish your fancy portrait of me, and you'll never find out how very unlike me it is. And I shall read about you in the newspapers and be very proud—and—come along, Rosy!³

³ *Crosses to him.
Lady R. meets
her.*

(Going off. FALKNER is going after her.)

SIR C.

(Stepping him.) It can answer no purpose, Ned.

FALKNER.

What the devil has it got to do with you? You've taken her from me. Leave her to me for a few minutes. Lady Jessica, I claim to speak to you alone.

LADY J.

It can only be to say "Good-bye."

FALKNER.

I'll never say it.

LADY J.

Then I must. Good-bye!

FALKNER.

No—say it to me alone.

LADY J.

It can only be that—no more——

FALKNER.

Say it to me alone. (*Pointing to curtains.*)

LADY J.

Rosy, wait for me.¹ I won't be a minute.

¹ *Falkner goes to opening C. holds curtains aside, till Lady Jess is off, then follows her.*

(*Going to FALKNER. LADY ROSAMUND makes a little movement to stop her. SIR CHRISTOPHER by a gesture silences LADY ROSAMUND and allows LADY JESSICA to pass through the curtains where FALKNER has preceded her.*)

SIR C.

(*To LADY JESSICA.*) Remember his future is at stake as well as yours. Only the one word.

LADY J.

(*As she passes through curtains.*) Only the one word.²

² *Lady R. crosses to Sir C., shakes his hand.*

SIR C.

(To LADY ROSAMUND.) You'll excuse my packing.⁶ I've not a moment to waste.

(Enter TAPLIN.)²

TAPLIN.

Mr. Gilbert Nepean, Sir Christopher; he says he must see you.³

SIR C.

You didn't say Lady Jessica was here?

TAPLIN.

No, Sir Christopher.

SIR C.

I'll come to him.

(Exit TAPLIN. LADY ROSAMUND passes between the curtains. SIR CHRISTOPHER is going to door, meets GILBERT NEPEAN who enters very excitedly.)

GILBERT.

(Off L.) Deering! Deering, she's not at home! She's not at her sister's. You don't think she has gone to that fellow?

SIR C.

Make yourself easy. She is coming back to you.

GILBERT.

Where is she?

SIR C.

Will you let me take a message to her? May I tell her that for the future you will treat her with every kindness and consideration?

GILBERT.

Yes—yes. Say—oh—tell her what you please.

¹ Goes behind table R. C.

² L.

³ Lady R. crosses to opening, closes curtains.

Say I know I've behaved like a bear. Tell her I'm sorry, and if she'll come home I'll do my best to make her happy in future.

SIR C.

And (*taking out watch*) it's rather too late for dinner, may I suggest an invitation to supper?

GILBERT.

Yes,—yes.

SIR C.

Lady Rosamund—(*Calls.*)

(LADY ROSAMUND *enters.*)¹

GILBERT.

You—

(*Going towards curtains.* SIR CHRISTOPHER *intercepts him.*)

LADY R.

We stepped over to ask Sir Christopher's advice.

SIR C.

And, strange to say, they've taken it.

GILBERT.

(*Trying to get to curtains.*) Where is Jessica?

SIR C.

(*Stopping him.*) No.² I'm to take the message. Lady Jessica, your husband is waiting to take you to supper. You've only just time to go home and dress.

(LADY JESSICA *draws curtains aside, turns and throws a last agonized adieu to FALKNER who stands speechless and helpless.* LADY JESSICA *then controls her features and comes out to GILBERT.* *The curtains close.*)

¹ 5th Call.
Beatrice.

² Sir C. turns
Gilbert round,
his back to
where Lady
Jess is.

GILBERT.

Will you come home and dress and go to the Savoy to supper? (*Offering arm.*)

LADY J.

Delighted. (*Taking his arm.*)

GILBERT.

And you, Rosy?

LADY R.

I can't. (*Looking at watch.*) It's nearly ten o'clock!¹ Good-night, Sir Christopher. Good-night, dearest. (*Kissing LADY JESSICA.*) Good-night, Gilbert.² Take care of her, or you'll lose her. Excuse my running away, I must get back to my poor old Freddie.

¹ Crosses to C.

² Crosses to L. of Gilbert.

(*Exit LADY ROSAMUND. FALKNER's face appears through the curtains. LADY JESSICA sees it.*)

SIR C.

Good-night, Lady Jessica, and good-bye!

LADY J.

Good-night, Sir Christopher, and—(*at FALKNER*) one last "Good-bye."

(*She looks towards curtains as if about to break away from GILBERT and go to FALKNER.*)

SIR C.

Good-night, Nepean!

GILBERT.

Good-night, Deering.

SIR C.

Try and keep her. She's worth the keeping.

GILBERT.

I'll try.

3 L

(*Exeunt LADY JESSICA and GILBERT.*¹ SIR CHRISTOPHER goes towards door with them; FALKNER comes forward in great despair from curtains, throws himself into chair against table, buries his face in his hands.)*

Warn curtains.

SIR C.

(*Goes to him very affectionately.*) Come! Come! My dear old Ned! This will never do! And all for a woman! They're not worth it. (*Aside, softly.*) Except one! They're not worth it. Come, buckle on your courage! There's work in front of you, and fame, and honour! And I must take you out and bring you back with flying colours! Come! Come! My dear old fellow!

FALKNER.

Let me be for a minute, Kit. Let me be!

3 L

(*Enter BEATRICE.*² SIR CHRISTOPHER goes to her.)

BEA.

What's the matter?

SIR C.

Hush! Poor old chap! He's hard hit! Everybody else seems to be making a great mess of their love affairs. We won't make a mess of ours?

BEA.

No. You'll get over this, Ned? We'll help you. You'll get over it?

FALKNER.

(*Rising with great determination.*) Yes, I shall

pull round. I'll try! I'll try! To-morrow, Kit?
We start to-morrow?

SIR C.²

¹ C. Beatrice L.
Falkner R.

(Putting one arm round each affectionately.)
To-morrow! My wife! My friend! My two comrades!

CURTAIN.

(Time—21 minutes.)

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